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DIEULOUARD BRIDGEHEAD OPERATION

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Combat Studies Institute  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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# **DIEULOUARD BRIDGEHEAD OPERATION**

## **THE LORRAINE CAMPAIGN**

**SEPTEMBER—DECEMBER 1944**

Submitted by  
Staff Group C, Section 22, 25 May 1984

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## **DIEULOUARD RIVER CROSSING**

**A description of the United States Army's deliberate river  
crossing of the Moselle River north of Nancy in France  
during the Lorraine Campaign of World War II**

## **DIEULOUARD RIVER CROSSING**

**Offensive, Deliberate Assault, River Crossing**

**80th Infantry Division  
Combat command A, 4th Armored Division**

**September 1944**

**Prepared by: Staff Group C, Section 22**

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# ABSTRACT

COMMON REFERENCE: Dieulouard Bridge Crossing

TYPE OPERATION: Offensive Deliberate Assault, River Crossing

OPPOSING FORCES: U.S.: 80th Infantry Division  
Combat Command A, 4th Armored Division

German: 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division

SYNOPSIS: This operation resulted from the XII Corps' plan to envelop Nancy from the north and to capture it so that the corps could continue its attack in sector toward the West Wall and beyond. The initial plan called for a single envelopment north of Nancy with one regimental combat team of the 80th Infantry Division conducting a hasty crossing of the Moselle River near Pont-a-Mousson. Once a bridgehead was established, Combat Command A, 4th Armored Division was to exploit by striding eastward to encircle Nancy and trap the German defenders there. Another regimental combat team of the 80th Infantry Division was to force a crossing of the Moselle near Toul and to attack Nancy from the West. The initial attempt to cross the Moselle north of Nancy failed, however, because of poor reconnaissance, lack of artillery support, faulty coordination, and a tenacious defense by a strong enemy force holding good terrain. After the 35th Infantry Division and Combat Command B, 4th Armored Division, crossed the Moselle south of Nancy, the corps commander ordered another crossing north of Nancy to execute a double envelopment of the city. This crossing was successful. The 80th Infantry Division secured a bridgehead at Dieulouard and Combat Command A, 4th Armored Division, passed through the bridgehead and exploited to secure the high ground around Arracourt, thereby preventing the escape of German forces trapped in the Nancy pocket. The successful crossing at Dieulouard illustrates



the need to cross armor into a bridgehead as soon as possible in order to retain the power of maneuver, to provide mobile forces for rapid penetration and movement toward follow-on objectives, and to provide firepower and maneuver against hostile counterattacks against the bridgehead.

## I. STRATEGIC SETTING

The Allies, after the invasion of Normandy in June 1944, adopted what has become known as the "Broad Front Strategy" for their push toward Germany. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, decided to advance through western Europe on two principal avenues. The primary avenue of approach through Belgium to the Ruhr industrial area was given to the 21st Army Group commanded by Field Marshall Sir Bernard L. Montgomery.[1] 21st Army Group was composed of the Canadian First Army and the British Second Army (ranged respectively from north to south). South of the 21st Army Group was the 12th Army Group commanded by Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley. Making up the 12th Army Group were the First and Third United States Armies, again ranged from north to south across the northern half of France.

Opposing the Allies were the German 15th Army, First Parachute Army, Seventh Army, First Army, 66th Reserve Corps and 19th Army (from north to south respectively).[2] Army Group B, commanded by Field Marshall Model, controlled the 15th Army, First Parachute Army, Seventh Army and First Army. 66th Reserve Corps and 19th Army were part of Army Group G commanded by Generaloberst Blaskowitz.

Although Montgomery's 21st Army Group was the main

effort, "the United States Third Army was to advance in the south along the secondary avenue of approach to cross the Moselle River near Nancy and advance through Alsace-Lorraine to make Rhine River crossings near Mannheim and Mainz." [3] Third Army was commanded by Lieutenant General George S. Patton and was expected to capture the Saar industrial area.

Success along both avenues of approach would capture significant portions of the German industrial regions (the Ruhr and the Saar) and would severely restrict their capability to wage war. Additionally, success would cause the Germans to distribute their remaining forces across a very wide front--too wide for them to support.

## ENDNOTES

### (I. STRATEGIC SETTING)

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Barnes, "Arracourt - September 1944," thesis submitted to the US Army Command and General Staff College, 1982, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Kent Roberts Greenfield, Command Decisions (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, p. 1960), Map VIII at rear of book.

<sup>3</sup> Barnes, p. 2.

## II. REVIEW OF THE TACTICAL SITUATION

A. The Area of Operations1. Climate and Weather

The late summer and early fall of the year is the chief rainy season in Lorraine (average 2.4-3 inches per month). The effect of this season is to present the soldier with a preponderance of light rain interspersed with occasional storms. Fog is common in this season and may last throughout the day. The impact of the rain is felt in churned farm lands and secondary unimproved roads. The resulting reliance on improved roads in 1944 tended to cause extensive wear and make road movement more predictable to the enemy. The rivers, streams, and canals begin to crest at this time of the year, increasing the flow rate and impacting on bridging operations. Commonly used fords (where they may exist) become less usable and the effect of deliberately destroyed waterways and reservoirs can prove disastrous to maneuverability.[1]

September of 1944 was one of the wettest and foggiest months on record. Up to five inches of rain fell over twenty of the days and fog was on the ground for fifteen days. The result was poor observation of enemy positions, improved concealment and the more effective use of surprise by the enemy in counterattack. Vehicular movement was not

stopped but was slowed, and the role of the foot soldier became proportionately more important. Numerous pontoon bridges were washed downstream by the increased current.[2]

The combination of weather and terrain generally provided the enemy with advantageous defensive conditions and directly impacted on the "cost" of the Dieulouard bridgehead.

## 2. Terrain

Historically, a perspective of Lorraine leads the student to the conclusion that the ground has been popular with generals. Dozens of battles and campaigns have been fought for possession of this region. At the operational level, the reasons are three-fold:

(1) It serves as a natural line of communication from the sources of mineral wealth in the Saar/Ruhr area of Germany to the ports of the Low Countries and France.

(2) The terrain lends itself to the maneuver of large forces due to its open and rolling nature.

(3) Lorraine holds the sources and confluences of several navigable rivers and the city fortresses built to protect them.[3]

The same characteristics applied in World War II, but were secondary to the strategic goal, outlined by Eisenhower, of maintaining a broad front offensive to destroy German forces and occupy Germany. This implied that, whatever the terrain, Allied forces would advance with German objectives in mind. Lorraine was simply one of several avenues of approach and not an objective in itself.

From a tactical perspective, analysis of the terrain reveals a land of moderate elevation (200-1300 feet) and rich farm land crosscut with numerous waterways (natural and man-made). It is generally open but interspersed with maintained coniferous and deciduous forests and numerous small villages (which represent the chief obstacle to maneuverability). In wet weather, the naturally heavy gray-podzolic and brown forest soils are quickly waterlogged, hampering maneuverability for all elements.[4]

The Moselle is the main river of the region flowing north-west, with a rapid current, to Luxembourg. The Muerthe River flows through Luneville, emptying into the Moselle between Nancy and Dieulouard. These rivers are generally unfordable.

Focusing on Dieulouard, the Moselle was the dominant terrain feature, a major obstacle in itself, with numerous terrain peculiarities such as bluffs, defiles, and shallow

hill masses on either bank. The river was composed of two channels (or "arms"), paralleled on the west by a canal (the Rhin) separated from the river by a dike. The effect of the two necessitating three separate bridging operations (over the Rhin Canal, and over each of the two arms). The banks of the Moselle were moderately soft due to extensive rainfall, yet required cutting "shoulders" for bridging. The current flowed at 6-7 mph. the river was approximately 150 feet wide and 6-8 feet deep at the crossing place. The bottom was muddy (the 1117th Engineer Gp attempted to ford with a Sherman medium tank and it bogged down).[5]

The key hill terrain in the area on the east side of the river was the Mousson Hill to the north of the bridgehead, the Genevieve hill mass in the center, a hill mass northeast of Bezaumont, and the Hill of Falaise in the south. These hill masses all had line-of-sight to Dieulouard, the approaches to the river, and the bridgehead. The chief manmade features to the east were the towns of Bezaumont, directly east of Dieulouard; the town of Loisy, northeast of Dieulouard and situated on the Moselle; and the town of St. Genevieve to the east of Loisy. Pont-a-Mousson, on the Moselle north of Dieulouard, was a medium-sized town with a bridge over the river. The island in the Moselle at Dieulouard had a macadam road over it. A good highway connected Bezaumont and Loisy.[6]



The west bank of the Moselle was dominated by Dieulouard, a medium-sized village. The town itself was too restricted for large vehicular movement and was not used extensively. The hills of the west bank were not as dominant as those of the east, but did provide good concealment to U.S. forces prior to the river crossing and excellent sites for artillery placement.[7]

While crossing the Moselle from west to east, the ground consisted of fairly open flood plain, followed by the east bank of the river. Beyond the east bank was a gently-sloping plain of approximately 200 meters which began to rise steeply at that point to the elevations of Mousson, Genevieve and Bezaumont. Therefore, these heights tended to overlook and dominate the river and its approaches.[8]

B. Comparison of Opposing Forces

1. Size and Composition

80th Infantry Division (14,080 personnel by TO&E)

Organic:

317th Inf

318th Inf

319th Inf

80th Recon Troop

305th Engr Combat Bn

305th Med Bn

313 FA Bn (105)

314th FA Bn (105)

315th FA Bn (105)

905th FA Bn (105)

780th Ord Lgt Maint co

80th QM co

80th Sig Co

MP Platoon

HHQ

Band

Attachments:

633d AAA AW Bn (MBL)

702d Tk Bn (- Co D)

610th Tank Test Lbn (SP)

Reinforcing Artillery:

512th FA Bn (105)

974th FA bn (105)

775th Mtr Bn (4.5")

176th Mtr Bn (4.5")

Detachments, 11-15 Sep:

319th Inf Bn to 4th Arm 11-15 Sep

1st Bn, 318th Inf to 4th Arm 12-15 Sep

Combat Command A (CCA), 4th Arm Div

37th Tk Bn

53d Arm Inf bn

25th Recon Squadron (Mech)

94th FA Bn

191st FA Bn

66th Arm FA Bn

Co C 24th Engr Bn

Service Co, 53d Arm Inf bn

Co A 166th Combat Engr Bn

1st Bn, 318th Inf Rgt (attached from 80th Div)

Co A, 46th Arm Med Bn

Combat Trans Co A, 126th Ord Bn[9]

3d Panzier Grenadier Div (14,738 Personnel by T0&E)

## Organic:

- 2 Inf Regts
- 1 Arty Bn (SP)
- 1 Arty Regt
- 1 Recon Bn
- 1 Tk Destroyer Bn
- 1 Sig Bn
- 1 Engr Bn
- Combt Trains
- 1 AT Bn

92d Luftwaffe Field Regt (9,800 Personnel by T0&E)[10]2. Technology

## a. Armor

The principal technological influences operative in the crossing of the Moselle River derived from the controversy surrounding the development of the American tank during the interwar period. Influenced primarily by senior infantry officers, the American tank was envisioned to be an extension of and enhancement to infantry forces, as opposed to constituting a separate tank force. Accordingly, infantry proponents sought to develop a small, mobile tank,

lightly armored and lightly armed. Controversy surrounding this decision prevailed during the interwar period; however, at the outset of the invasion into Europe, American forces had the Stuart tank (16 tons, 37mm main gun) and the Sherman tank (35 tons, 75mm main gun). Contrasted to their German counterparts, the Mark IV (24 tons, long 75mm main gun) and Mark V (43 tons, 75mm main gun), the American versions were decidedly lighter and had less firepower. The question of vulnerability and effectiveness of the two respective tank forces lacks a consensus opinion, even in hindsight. Many argue that the interwar American planners were accurate in their assessment of the need for a small agile tank that could outmaneuver its opposition. The exploits of Combat Command A (CCA), 4th Armd Div, during the Moselle Crossing and immediately afterward seem to support this view. During the month of September, 1944, 3d Army's loss exchange ratios were as follows:

| <u>Tank</u> | <u>Losses</u> |
|-------------|---------------|
| Mark II, IV | 421           |
| Stuart      | 49            |
| Mark V      | 186           |
| Sherman     | 1511111       |

These figures, of course, represent overall losses from all sources. However, they should provide reason for pause even

when the suggestion is made that light American tanks were severely disadvantages during the war.

b. Air Power

Allied air power was vastly superior to Germany's during September, 1944. Across 3d Army only 287 enemy aircraft were available during the month, down from 3,213 available in August.[12] In contrast, XIX TAC flew 7,719 sorties during September in support of 3d Army.[13]

c. Artillery

The American artillery systems used during the Lorraine campaign were clearly superior to the German systems and, perhaps, from the perspective of the Germans, the single most feared part of the American arsenal.[14] Technologically, the 105mm howitzer was superior to its German counterpart. In addition, the sub-systems of communication and observation and the capability to mass fire from a number of different battalions contributed to the overall effectiveness and lethality of the system.

3. Logistical and Administrative Systems

Germany, long starved by a continuing war of attrition on multiple fronts was on her last leg. Personnel shortages compounded by inadequate training resulted in many of her

front line units being manned with teenagers and older men. During late 1944 her industrial base had begun to falter. The new equipment which did arrive was often too little to make a difference.

The American administrative and logistical systems suffered from a completely different problem, although the end result was much the same--lack of properly trained personnel and lack of equipment on the front lines. Even though American industry was burgeoning and there were volumes of material and personnel available, their shipment was choked through limited port facilities and long lines of communications from the French coast to the front lines of 3d Army. Patton's advance was stymied because it literally "ran out of gas".

The logistical backdrop for the Moselle River crossing was not favorable to XII Corps. The allies in this region were on the verge of experiencing a significant logistical system failure. In essence the reasons for this were two-fold. First, the allied planners had anticipated that the German forces would make successive stands along the major north-south river obstacles dividing the region, allowing a steady, though reasonably slow, rate of advance by the Allies.[15] In reality, the advance across France was so rapid that by early September the Allies had 33% more forces (16 divisions) at 150 miles further inland than had

been projected.[16]

Because of the initial buildup of supplies due to the slow movement in the first seven weeks of the invasion, the strain on the supply system was not immediately manifest to the tactical commanders. Their decision to vigorously pursue the enemy, though logical from their point of view, served only to push the logistical system to the breaking point.[17] Exacerbating the problem was the fact that the port facilities planned for the Brittany area were scrubbed because of the rapid advance.[18] Thus, the overall situation was one of too few ports supporting excessively long lines of communication to too many divisions.



#### 4. Command, Control, and Communications Systems

Organization of the 80th Division for the crossing of the Moselle River is shown below:

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| 317th Inf          | Initial crossing force to secure bridgehead and objectives of hills and ridges due east of Dieulouard      |
| 318th Inf (-)      | Following the crossing force to secure bridgehead, area north of 317th and secure Mousson Hill             |
| 319th Inf          | Engaged astride the Moselle at Toul  |
| CCA, 4th Arm Div   | Cross through the infantry bridgehead four hours after bridges were in place and strike for Chateau Salins |
| 305th Engr Cbt Bn  | Assigned task of crossing the assault force  |
| 1117th Engr Cbt Gp | Assigned mission of putting in heavy bridges and acting as the combat reserve[19]                          |

It appears that there was a good working relationship between MG Eddy and his subordinate commanders. When his division commanders told him of their reservations about his plans, he was usually persuaded to make some minor changes to the plans to accommodate his subordinates' concerns. For example, when MG Wood was informed of the plan to use both the 35th Inf and the 4th Arm south of Nancy, Wood called COL Ralph Canine, Chief of Staff of XII Corps and told him, "My

people are appalled at this thing." [20] MG Eddy then changed the plan to use the 35th Div south of Nancy and the 80th Div north of Nancy to conduct a double envelopment. [21]

Command and control during the Dieulouard operation varied from good to bad. During the majority of the operation it was adequate; however, after the initial crossing at Dieulouard, when the Germans launched their counterattack, command and control disintegrated. There were times when colonels commanded platoons and captains commanded battalions. This, however, is not unusual when operations become disorganized because of unplanned actions. Overall, the command and control of the operation was adequate.

Most of the resources available to the 80th Div were used to maximize its combat process. The artillery was used prior to the crossing to deceive the enemy as to the true location of the crossing. Air Corps sorties were used to destroy bridges in the enemy rear to impede the arrival of reinforcements. The engineers were used to run the crossing site and build the bridges for the crossing. Finally, the reconnaissance units were utilized to obtain as much information about the enemy as possible. [22]

### 5. Intelligence

Intelligence assets available to the 80th Div were extremely limited. The only assigned asset was its reconnaissance troop. Very little was known about the enemy strength and disposition at the Dieulouard crossing. Some dismounted reconnaissance patrols were utilized to develop information about the enemy; however, they were discontinued prior to the crossing because MG McBride wanted the enemy forces to believe that the crossing would actually take place somewhere else.[23]

Some intelligence about the enemy was supplied by French reconnaissance teams and the French underground. The value of this intelligence is questionable. Overall, the intelligence information available to the U.S. commanders was vague and sketchy at best.[24]

### 6. Doctrine and Training

River crossing doctrine was fairly well established by the time of the XII Corps crossing of the Moselle River. It was well covered in both the engineer field manuals and the operations manuals.

In all the manuals, river crossings were to be conducted in three phases. In the first phase, the infantry rifle companies, heavy weapons company, command post elements,

and mortars were brought to the far shore to establish a bridgehead by the use of assault boats. They were assigned an objective that eliminated small arms fire from the crossing site.[25] When assault boats were utilized, an engineer company was assigned the task of crossing a battalion, an engineer battalion to cross a regiment. M-1 assault boats were utilized during crossing operations. Each assault boat could carry one rifle squad of 12 men, two light machinegun squads, one heavy machinegun squad, two 60mm mortar squads, one 81mm mortar squad, or one 37mm AT squad.[26] Crossings were accomplished on a broad front with approximately 20 meters between boats and a battalion frontage of 600-2400 meters.[27] The crossing would be done under the supervision of the engineer unit. The infantry units would occupy assembly areas, be guided to the crossing site, loaded into boats crewed by the three engineer troops, paddle to the far side, unload, and the boat crews would take the boats back to the near bank for a second load.[28]

When small arms fire had been eliminated from the bridgehead area, the engineer unit would normally install several M1938 footbridges. The footbridges were standard means for effecting rapid passage of foot troops across a stream. They were capable of

spanning 432 feet.[29]

The second phase of the operation would begin when enemy observed indirect fire was eliminated for the bridgehead area.[30] During this phase Infantry support rafts and pontoon bridges would be installed. The infantry support raft was used to ferry vehicles and troops up to the limit of a 2 1/2-ton truck fully loaded. They consisted of six M-2 assault boats connected in pairs to form floats with a plywood flooring.[31] Pontoon bridges came in 10-ton and 25-ton models. The 25-ton models were reinforced to cross the tank units.[32]

The third phase consisted of bringing the remainder of the combat support and combat service support forces to the far bank and was initiated when the bridgehead was expanding so there was sufficient maneuver room on the far bank.[33]

There were six general principles which the manuals stressed:

- (1) Engineers attached to the leading elements of the division should be sufficient only to provide each of the units with the means necessary for its own operation. Engineer units providing the crossing means for

the remainder of the division should operate under division control.

(2) In making attachments, provisions should be made for normal association of units and for prompt reversion of attached engineer units to division control as soon as they have completed the tasks for which attached.

(3) Plans should not require units completing one task to be assigned another task immediately. The plan should provide for at least a nucleus of fresh engineer troops for each major engineer task.

(4) Unit of command must be maintained as far as practicable.

(5) Provisions should be made for engineer units to carry on work in rear areas during the crossing and assist advance on the far side by overcoming obstacles and doing emergency work on the roads.

(6) Men and equipment should be held in reserve to replace losses and exploit successes. At division level this should consist of 1/3 of the assets.[34]

During the time of the Moselle River crossing, there were two methods of assigning engineer units for river crossings. The method that was the most effective from an engineer standpoint was to use engineer units in support of

the operation. The other method was to attach the units to the division ffb crossing. During a corps crossing, it was advised that the engineers be used in a support role; when a division was crossing, the engineers should be attached. If the units were attached to divisions, they should revert to corps control as soon as the majority of the division had crossed.[35]

At the time of the 80th Div crossing at Dieulouard, the engineer task organization and assigned missions were as follows:

Task Organization and Missions of Engineers

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 306th Engr Cbt Bn (-)              | Cross elements of 317th Inf and 316th Inf over Moselle River.  |
| 1117th Engr Cbt Gp<br>(in support) | Bridge Moselle River and Rhin Canal with Infantry Support Raft Bridge and Heavy Ponton Bridge.   |
| Co B, 305th Engr                   | Construct two expedient foot bridges over canal, then move assault boats into position on the river. 3d Bn, 317th Inf will cross in this area over bridges and with assault boats. |

Co A, 305th Engr

At same time crossing is being carried out by Co B, will construct one expedient foot bridge over the canal, then guide infantry through existing foot bridge over canal, and one constructed bridge, and through fords at Moselle River. Co A (-) will accompany 1st Bn, 317th Inf, carrying tools, explosives, rope and rubber pneumatic boats.

248th Engr Bn,  
1117th Engr Gp

Construct Infantry Support Raft Bridge after small arms fire is eliminated from crossing site.

553d Engr Hvy Ponton Bn  
and  
167th Engr Bn, 1117 Engr  
Gp

Construct Heavy Ponton Bridge after small arms and observed artillery fire are eliminated.[36]

The crossing at Dieulouard complied with the established river crossing doctrine except for the fact that the bridges were constructed under both small arms and observed indirect fires. No other violations of doctrine were evident.



## 7. Condition and Morale

### a. U.S.

"Thus was the way opened for the 4th Armored Division, led by Combat Command A (CCA), to break clear of organized German resistance and embark on an exploitation advance unequaled in history. In but a month, the 4th Armored Division swept over 1000 miles before grinding to a halt on the banks of the Moselle River." [37] This unexpected halt was not due to excessive fatigue, depletion of troop strength, or a low fighting spirit. Rather, it was caused by the collapse of American supply lines.

The condition and morale of the soldiers and units of the 3d Army could not have been better during the August<sup>early</sup>-September 1944 time frame. They had just spent approximately six weeks on the offensive, inflicting tremendous casualties on the enemy, and rarely, if ever, encountering a set-back. By early September, the 3d Army had processed 62,000 prisoners of war, counted approximately 19,000 enemy dead, and estimated another 61,000 wounded; its casualties had remained negligible in comparison. [38] Of course, it was the 80th Inf Div and the 4th Armd Div of the XII Corps that lead the unparalleled onslaught to the Moselle River, only to be bivouac<sup>x</sup>ed at August's end due to the lack of gasoline and lubricants.

For ten or so days the two divisions enjoyed a well-deserved rest. However, during this same period considerable planning and maintenance was performed in preparation for the inevitable crossing of the Moselle River. It can be concluded that when the 80th Inf Div first attempted a crossing on 5 September and later succeeded on 11 September, the troops were well-fitted, rested, and eager to continue their exploits. The many recorded heroics by the men of the 317th and 318th Inf Regts, CCA, and the attached 305th and 1117th Engr units during the crossing at Dieulouard prove this to be true.

Although they were as physically miserable as any soldier can be, regardless of the circumstances of battle, the American soldiers were far better off than their German counterparts and knew it. "They had trained together and had moved as a unit from the U.S. through England and then fought through France." [39] In short, U.S. forces that crossed the Moselle at Dieulouard were a cohesive, combat-effective machine at virtually every level of command.

b. German

In contrast to the American units, the condition and morale of the German units ~~was~~ very poor. Even the best

fighting unit at Dieulouard, the 3d Panzer Grenadier Division, which had recently been transferred from Italy, lacked the combat power and combat support to sustain itself (despite the fact that its morale was high and its ranks nearly full).[40] However, during a single ten-day period, 3 September-13 September, this division would suffer approximately 2000 casualties, 1000 of which would be in the Dieulouard sector.[41]

Flanking the 3d Panzer Div to the south was the 92d Luftwaffe Field Regiment. A one-time training unit now hastily converted to a combat unit, its composition was a hodge-podge "collection of antiaircraft gunners and Luftwaffe replacements stationed in and around Nancy." [42] Its combat effectiveness was, at best, questionable.

Finally, to the south of the 92d was the 553d Volksgrenadier Division defending Nancy. Though not directly encountered in the Dieulouard crossing, the appearance of this type division is significant when analyzing the overall condition of the German forces. The 553d was one of a series known as Gotterdammerung divisions, which were given the high-sounding title of "grenadier divisions" instead of infantry divisions in an obvious attempt to hide their inferior quality.[43] During this same period of time many different types and sizes of new units were popping up all over the German front. For the

most part they were undergunned and undermanned. Moreover, there was little unit cohesion. Men were gathered from all over Germany--the young, the old, the previously injured, and the already discharged--put together as a unit without training, and immediately sent to the front. All of this was a sound indication of the extremes being used in scraping together manpower resources to wage a last-ditch effort. In many respects, it was also a psychological means to bolster the morale of the failing Wehrmacht. It was preferred practice by the Germans to create new units from the remnants of old ones rather than rebuild defeated units. "A soldier will fight better for a new unit than for an old unit which has already been defeated and decimated in battle." [44]

In spite of the make-shift ~~of~~ inadequate units and ~~in~~ ~~spite of~~ the XII U.S. Corps' August onslaught across France, the German units at Dieulouard fought well. There would be no more turning tail as the U.S. forces got closer and closer to the Fatherland. The desperation of the German soldier was beginning to peak, and consequently he once again became a tenacious and effective fighter. Counterattack after counterattack in the Dieulouard operation proved this to be true. There was still discipline in the leadership and courage within the ranks.

### 8. Leadership

From the highest levels of command on down to the lowest there is little doubt that the Americans had a decided edge over the Germans; not so much in the sense that U.S. leaders were more capable than their Wehrmacht counterparts; but, rather, with respect to the degree of freedom and initiative permitted by their superiors, the Americans were much better off. In general, U.S. leaders enjoyed considerably more freedom of action and were allowed, moreover encouraged, to make decisions at the lowest levels necessary to favorably influence the battle.

"It had been found early in the campaign that it was necessary to establish a division of responsibility and permit latitude of decision to staff officers and subordinate commanders that at first glance appeared radical. On closer examination, however, the advantage of this system became apparent. It permitted the officer on the spot and in full knowledge of the situation to make a decision quickly and take action when it was most needed and when it would do the most good. This was the teamwork that resulted from training closely together and becoming fully acquainted with each other." [45]

GEN Bradley gave GEN Patton free reign to accomplish his mission, and so it was all down the chain of command.

The system was extremely decentralized and flexible, allowing subordinates the greatest amount of responsibility.[46] The initiative displayed by American commanders proved to be of great importance in the Dieulouard bridgehead battle. Essentially, the three or four days of fighting within the bridgehead was done by widely separated small units operating almost independently. Decisions were made by the local commander.

Conversely, the German commander on the ground was allowed virtually no independent action. For better or worse, his orders came from Hitler himself with little or no alterations to accommodate the situation. "Interference by intervening headquarters in OKW directives was expressly forbidden. This interference from above did not allow the commander on the ground to make a decision." [47] Consequently, economy of force operations, timely communications, and timely actions overall were severely lacking and caused unnecessary confusion and, eventually, failure.

Yet another factor detrimental to the effectiveness of the German command structure was its instability. In less than two months time the Supreme Commander, West, changed four times. At first it was Von Rundstedt, then Von Kluge, then Model, and then back to Von Rundstedt again.[48] To compound the matter, many subordinate commanders were being

brought from the Eastern Front. These leaders were not prepared for operations against the Americans, whose tactics were considerably different and whose knowledge of the terrain was obviously better.[49]

The charismatic influence of the Von Rundstedts, Rommels, and Knobelsdorffs was no less than that of the Bradleys, Pattons, and Eddys. All were well-known, much-admired, respected, and capable leaders. The overriding difference between their effectiveness as commanders and that of their subordinates on the ground was a German centralized structure contrasted to a decentralized one for the U.S. As time passed, U.S. forces were able to exploit this weakness to an even greater advantage.

### C. Immediate Military Objectives

The 80th Division initially received the mission to cross the Moselle River on 4 September. The mission from Field Order Number 6 of XII corps read "Protect bridgehead Commercy-St. Mihiel. Secure bridgehead across Moselle and Muerthe Rivers vicinity Nancy, employing not to exceed one (1) combat team, clearing Foret DeHaye and seizing Nancy, and (1) combat team preceding 4th Armored Division.[50]

After being stalled for several days due to shortage of fuel, GEN Patton wanted to establish bridgeheads over the Moselle and strike quickly toward the Rhine. The strategic objective was to strike the Ruhr industrial area in the north with the main thrust and the Saar industrial area in the south with Patton's 3d Army. Success depended on the establishment of bridgeheads across the Moselle and Muerthe Rivers.[51]

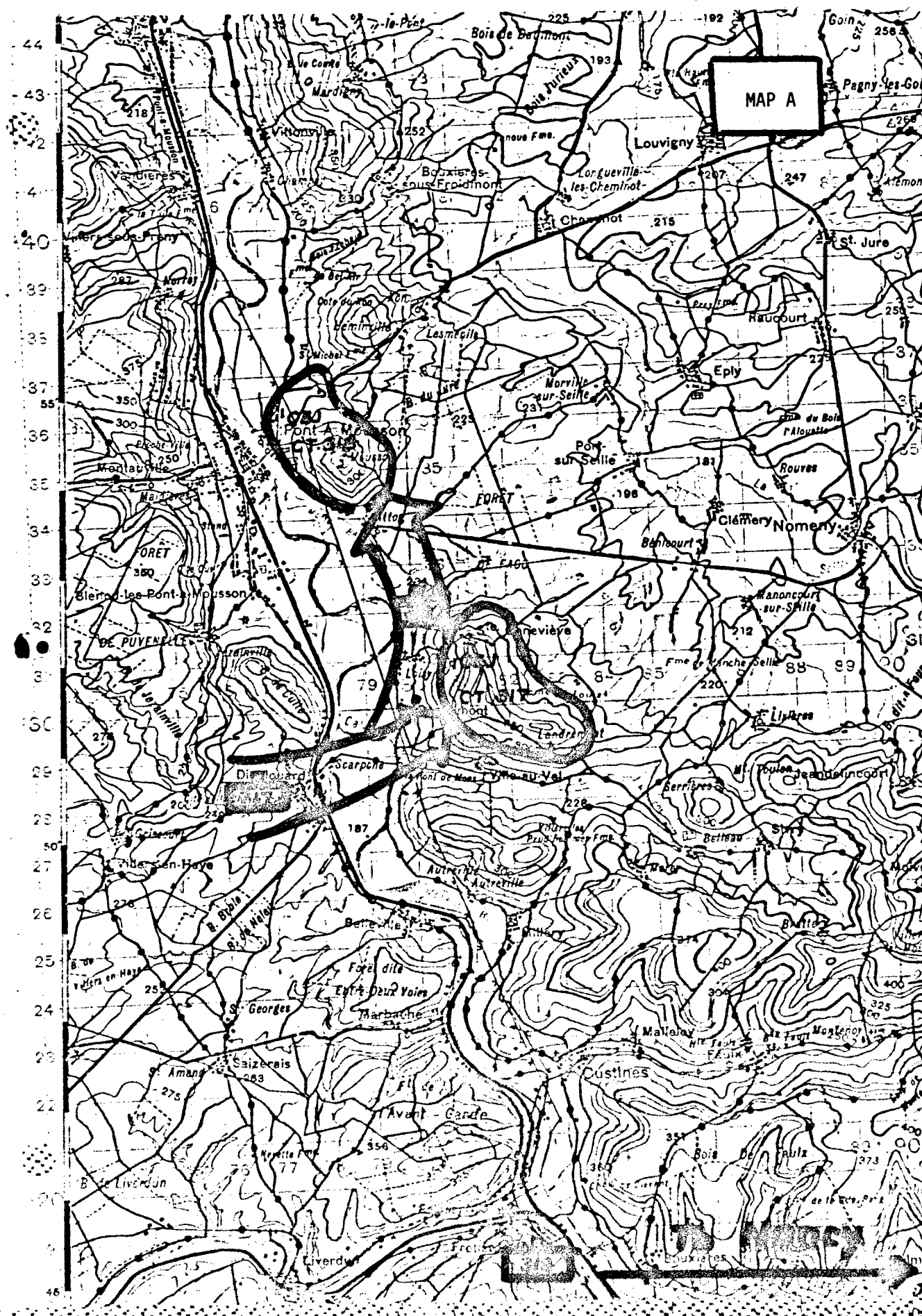
80th Division's order to the regiments was as follows: "CT (combat team) 317 crosses Moselle river under cover of darkness 4 and 5 September, secures bridgehead. CT 319 continues advance on Toul, secures bridgehead there with one (1) infantry battalion, be prepared to advance on and capture Nancy in conjunction with CCA, 4th Armored Division on order this headquarters. CT 318 (division reserve) (less 1 battalion attached CCA) secures high ground west of



Moselle River." [52] The attack by CT 317 failed while the attack by CT 319 succeeded in crossing the Moselle in the vicinity of Toul. After the aborted attempts at crossing the Moselle, orders were received to halt the operation and to conduct reconnaissance and prepare for future attacks to establish bridgeheads. The new objectives were for CT 317 on the left to establish a bridgehead in the vicinity of Belleville to allow the crossing of CCA. CT 318 in the center was to cross the Moselle near Pont-a-Mousson. On the right, CT 319 was to advance east of Toul and capture Nancy in a coordinated attack with CCA.

Field Order Number 11, issued at 1700 hours, 11 September 1944, provided that "80th Division (Reinforced) (less 1st Battalion, 318th Infantry with 4th Armored Division) attacks at 0400, 12 September 1944 to the east and established a bridgehead over the Moselle River in the vicinity south of Pont A Mousson. 80th Recon Troops with Company D, 702d Tank Battalion attached protects the north flank. CT 319 protects the south flank; CT 318 crosses Moselle River after crossing of CT 317, and captures Pont A Mousson. 80th Division Artillery supports the attack of CT 317. A preparation of 15 minutes will be fired by DIVARTY on the road east of Moselle River." [53] Specifically, CT 317 was to capture high ground east of Dieulouard (Map A) ~~on following page~~. CT 318 was to follow

CT 317 and move north to capture Pont A Mousson (Map A). CT 319 was to attack to the east and capture Nancy (Map B following Map A).



MAP A

1:50,000

# XII CORPS PLAN OF ATTACK

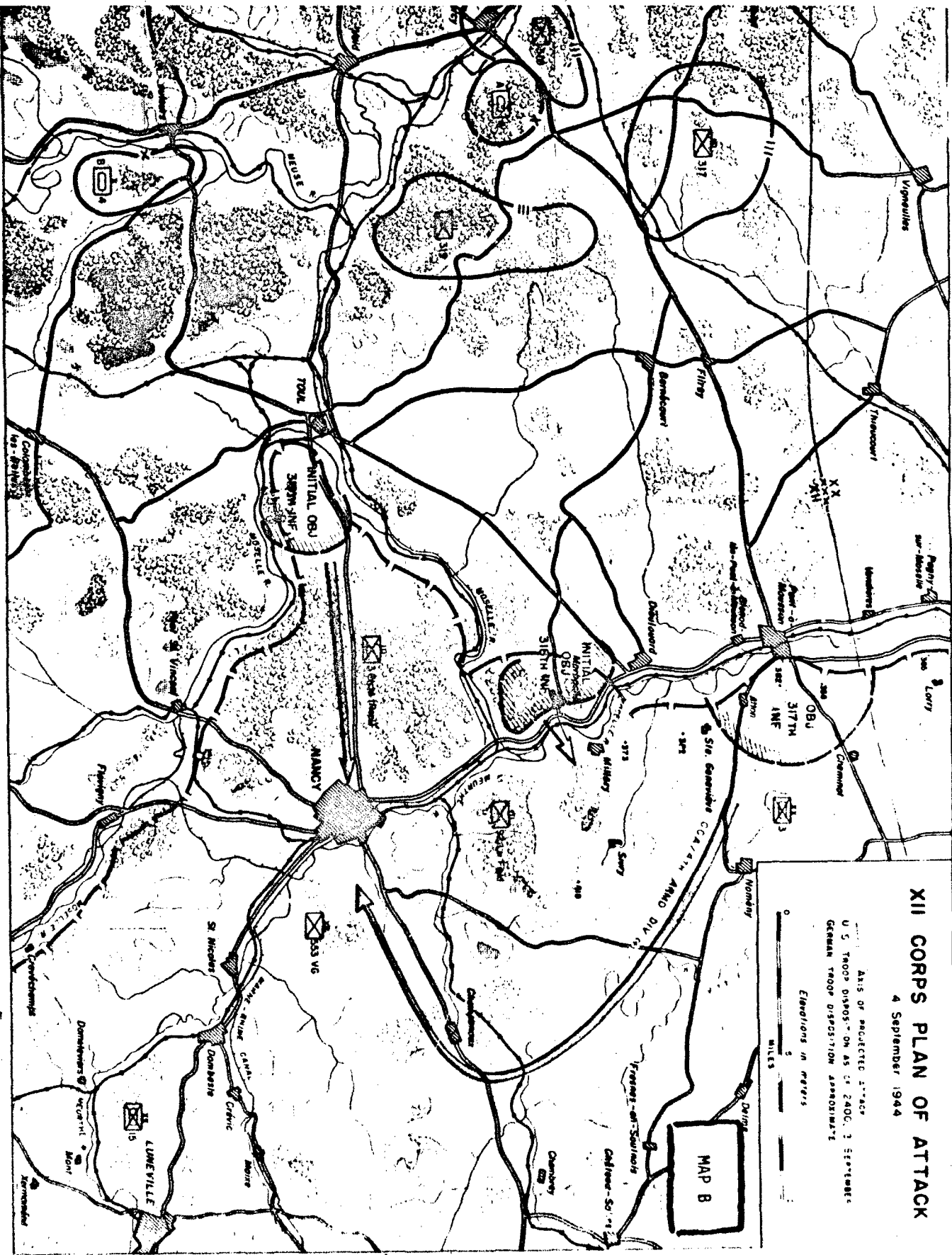
4 September 1944

Axis of projected attack  
U S Troop Disposition as of 2400, 3 September  
German Troop Disposition approximate

Elevations in meters

0 5 10  
MILES

MAP B



D. The Feasible Courses of Action for Each Antagonist

Forces in combat are very vulnerable when attempting to cross rivers while in contact with their enemy. Because of this vulnerability, U.S. forces during World War II, with emphasis on mission accomplishment, (while protecting lives) selected crossing sites by locating points of least resistance. Further, plans made for river crossing operations were usually done at corps and army level for division river crossings as the concern for enemy disposition became more evident.[54]

Normally, river crossings were more successful when rapid deployment away from the river could be accomplished. When natural obstacles or enemy forces on the far bank slowed the operations, casualties were high and the crossing was much more difficult to complete. Since American forces' concern about the nature of the threat in the area of the river crossing was of great importance, the type of crossing to be made, the size of the type crossing to be made, the size of the river and the surrounding terrain all played a vital role in the decision-making.[55]

The concern for lives of soldiers, mission accomplishment, and the nature of the river obstacle played a big part in the courses of action and changes to those courses of action that were made by the 80th Inf Div and CCA

at Dieulouard on the Moselle River. However, some of the experience gained in previous successful river crossings may have played a greater role in the initial course of action selected by MG Eddy, the XII Corps commander. The speed and surprise that provided earlier successful crossings strongly favored the use of the 4th Armored Division followed by Infantry at the Moselle. This course of action was not favored by MG Wood or MG McBride. They felt the Moselle River would be more difficult to cross than previous rivers; therefore McBride and Wood preferred using the armor to exploit an infantry bridgehead.[56]

On 4 September, after the 4th Armored Division had received enough gasoline to begin movement, MG Eddy decided on another course of action. The 317th, the 318th, and the 319th Infantry Regiments abreast would establish bridgeheads at three locations: Pont-a-Mousson, Belleville-Marbache, and Toul respectively. CCA with a battalion from the 318th Infantry was to pass through the bridgehead established by the 317th Infantry. After making a wide sweep, CCA, circling to the south, would then attack Nancy from the east. The American forces felt that the speed that had kept the Germans off balance for the past several days would get the Americans across the river without much adversity. This course of action failed, though, because the German forces had utilized their combat multipliers to turn back the

attack. For the most part, lack of a daylight reconnaissance, a daylight attack, lack of artillery preparation, poor intelligence estimates, and an enemy defending good ground all contributed to the American failure.[57]

On 7 September MG Eddy designed another course of action. Although opposed by the Headquarters, 4th Armd Div, MG Eddy considered reports of the corps cavalry, the river obstacle, and the terrain before making the decision to go ahead with his plan. He intended to use the 30th Infantry Division south of Nancy in an envelopment, while using Combat Command B (CCB), 4th Armd Div, to provide the thrust necessary to complete the operation. The 80th Inf Div would then be committed north of Nancy after the enemy attention switched to the south. The commitment of the northern division would support a double envelopment of Nancy. CCA, now the corps reserve, would be able to exploit through the north or south.[58]

The successful attack of CCB on 11 September initiated MG Eddy's plan for the 80th Inf Div to begin its assault and establishment of a bridgehead at Dieulouard. Because of the previous failure of the 317th on 5-6 September, MG McBride and staff planned a course of action for the 80th Inf Div that would provide greater support for the crossing. This course of action called for the 317th and 318th Inf

Regts to cross the river in column, seizing hills east and north of Dieulouard. CCA would be prepared to cross through the infantry bridgehead. 1st Bn, 318th Inf, was attached to CCA, and the 1117th Engr Cbt Gp became the division reserve.[59]

The first attempt by the 80th Inf Div to cross the Moselle River was not a feasible course of action because it was based on reports received from the French Forces of the Interior, whose sources of information were becoming unreliable, and from cavalry patrols operating west of the Moselle. These reports and the speed with which the American forces had pushed back the Germans caused the XII Corps G-2 to provide poor intelligence about the status of the German forces on the east bank. The terrain defended by the German forces was well-chosen, because it provided an excellent vantage point from which to observe the crossing. That terrain also permitted the German forces to concentrate fire on the U.S. forces and they attempted the crossing.[60]

The second attempt to cross the Moselle by the 80th Inf Div was successful because the course of action selected took advantage of many combat multipliers. Lacking in its first attempt to cross the Moselle, air power provided damage to bridges on the Mauchere River that would have provided a route for German reinforcements to move from



Nancy into Dieulouard. Although the enemy still held ground superior for the defense, intelligence estimates were more precise and feints were used to conceal the actual crossing sites. A larger portion of American artillery further supported the crossing attempt, while engineers manned fifty machine guns in order to place fire on German positions.[61]

The German counteroffensive mounted against the 80th Inf Div at Dieulouard failed because the German commander did not have enough fresh troops that would add the necessary muscle to the fight. Those troops were necessary for the enemy force to be able to reach the crossing site.[62] When the word of trouble at the bridgehead reached CCA, action was taken by the 37th Tank Bn commander to clear the bridgehead, because the subordinate commanders of CCA were allowed to take responsibility and seize the initiative. The German defenders with excellent observation continued to punish the Americans with accurate fire. The U.S. forces were delayed throughout the attack many times, but eventually the bridgehead was secured for CCA's exploitation.[63]

Although the opposing commanders considered the combat power of their opposition, there were times when information was not available for accurate assessments of the situation. The American commanders knew that the terrain favored the

enemy, but felt they could rely upon the strength gained in the progressive movement to continue the thrust of the offensive. Staff estimates were, at times, considered but not used; on other occasions plans were changed to take account of staff estimates. Time played a key role during the period. The halt of the 4th Armd Div (caused by gasoline shortage) provided the Germans an opportunity to strengthen their defenses. The American commanders made several decisions quickly, simply evaluating the current situation and basing their decisions on what had to be done to continue the forward movement and support units already committed. Therefore, to the extent possible, commanders on both sides considered what we now call "the factors of METT-T" (mission, enemy, troops and time available, and terrain) in establishing possible courses of action.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> T. E. Burts, Summary of Interviews, 80th Infantry Division, Moselle River Crossing, September, 1944 unpublished notes of Division Historical Officer, Combined Arms Research Library, Ft Leavenworth, KS, 1944-45, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Cole, pp. 22-24.

<sup>4</sup> Cole, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> T. E. Burts, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> T. E. Burts, pp. 34-35.

<sup>7</sup> T. E. Burts, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> T. E. Burts, p. 68.

<sup>9</sup> The Establishment and Defense of the Nancy Bridgehead (Nancy Bridgehead), prepared by subordinate commanders and staff of CCA, 4th Armd Div, p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> Richard H. Barnes, "Arracourt - September 1944," thesis submitted to the US Army Command and General Staff College, 1982, pp. 171-172.

<sup>11</sup> After Action Report, 3d US Army, 1 Aug 1944 - 9 May 1945, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> After Action Report, 3d US Army, 1 Aug 1944 - 9 May 1945, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> "Strategy and Tactics," TM Magazine, No. 78, Jan - Feb 1980, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> "Strategy and Tactics," p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Roland C. Ruppenthal, Logistical Support of the Armies, Vol. 2, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ruppenthal, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Ruppenthal, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ruppenthal.

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Bridgehead, p. 69.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy Bridgehead.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Bridgehead, p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> Nancy Bridgehead, pp. 75-79.

<sup>23</sup> Nancy Bridgehead, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> Nancy Bridgehead.

<sup>25</sup> FM 100-5, Operations, 22 May 1941, p. 194.

<sup>26</sup> FM 5-6, Engineer Field Manual, Operations of Engineer Field Units,  
<sup>23</sup> April 1943, p. 104.

<sup>27</sup> FM 5-6, 23 April 1943, p. 89.

<sup>28</sup> FM 5-6, 23 April 1943, pp 91-94.

<sup>29</sup> FM 5-6, 23 April 1943, p. 107.

<sup>30</sup> FM 100-5, 22 May 1941, p. 194.

<sup>31</sup> FM 5-6, 23 April 1943, pp. 107-108.

<sup>32</sup> FM 5-6, 23 April 1943, p. 110.

<sup>33</sup> FM 100-5, 22 May 1941, p. 194.

<sup>34</sup> FM 5-6, 23 April 1943, pp. 117-120.

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum for COL Schmahl, Subject: ETO River Crossing Doctrine, from LTC W. H. Van Dine, OMC, with letters from MG C. R. Moore, Chief Engineer, ETO, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Extract from Engineer Operation Order, 110550 Sep 1944, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> "Armor in the Exploitation," Armored School student research paper, May 1949, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> After Action Report, G-2, 3d US Army, Annex 16, 1945, p. 17.

<sup>39</sup> Barnes, p. 159.

<sup>40</sup> Cole, p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> After Action Report, G-2, 3d US Army, Annex 16, 1945, p. LXV.

<sup>42</sup> Cole, p. 66.

<sup>43</sup> After Action Report, G-2, 3d US Army, Annex 16, 1945, p. LXVI.

<sup>44</sup> After Action Report, G-2, 3d US Army, Annex 16, 1945, p. LXIII.

<sup>45</sup> Nancy Bridgehead, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Barnes, p. 153.

<sup>47</sup> Barnes, p. 162.

<sup>48</sup> After Action Report, G-2, 3d US Army, Annex 16, 1945, p. LXVII.

<sup>49</sup> Barnes, p. 162.

<sup>50</sup> 80th Infantry Division After Action Report, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Major General F. W. Von Mellenthin, Panzer Battles (University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), pp. 374.378.

<sup>52</sup>80th Infantry Division After Action Report, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup>80th Infantry Division After Action Report, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup>LTC Dennis K. Culp, US Army. A Comparative Analysis of River Crossing Operations in the Twentieth Century, an individual research-based essay, US Army War College, 22 Apr 1982, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup>Culp, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup>Cole, pp. 57-58.

<sup>57</sup>Cole, pp. 58-65.

<sup>58</sup>Cole p. 70.

<sup>59</sup>Cole, pp. 75-80.

<sup>60</sup>Cole, pp 62-64.

<sup>61</sup>Cole, pp. 78-79.

<sup>62</sup>Cole, p. 81.

<sup>63</sup>Nancy Bridgehead, pp. 7-10.

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### III. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

#### A. Disposition of Forces

By early September General Patton's 3d Army was halted due to the shortage of fuel, but was well disposed, from an operational standpoint, to rend the German front line of defense. The German's were placed in such a manner that Patton would be able to work his forces against a German Army-level boundary dividing the 1st Army (General der Panzergruppen Otto Knobelsdorff) in the north and the 19th Army (General der Infanterie Frederich Wiese) in the south. Both German Armies were under the command of Army Group G (Generaloberst Johannes Blaskowitz).

At the end of August the 1st German Army was rapidly reinforced with the 3d and 15th Panzer Grenadier Divs, taking up positions on the east bank of the Moselle river. Elements of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Div were placed in defense of Metz (30 miles north of Nancy). By 2 September the combined strength of the 1st Army was approximately 3 1/2 divisions. As the lull in U.S. operations continued, further reinforcements were oncoming in the form of the 553d and 559th Volksgrenadier Divs and Division Number 462. The front of the 1st German Army stretched approximately 100 miles from Sedan in the north to a point approximately 15 miles south of Nancy. Patton's 3d Army streteched about 60

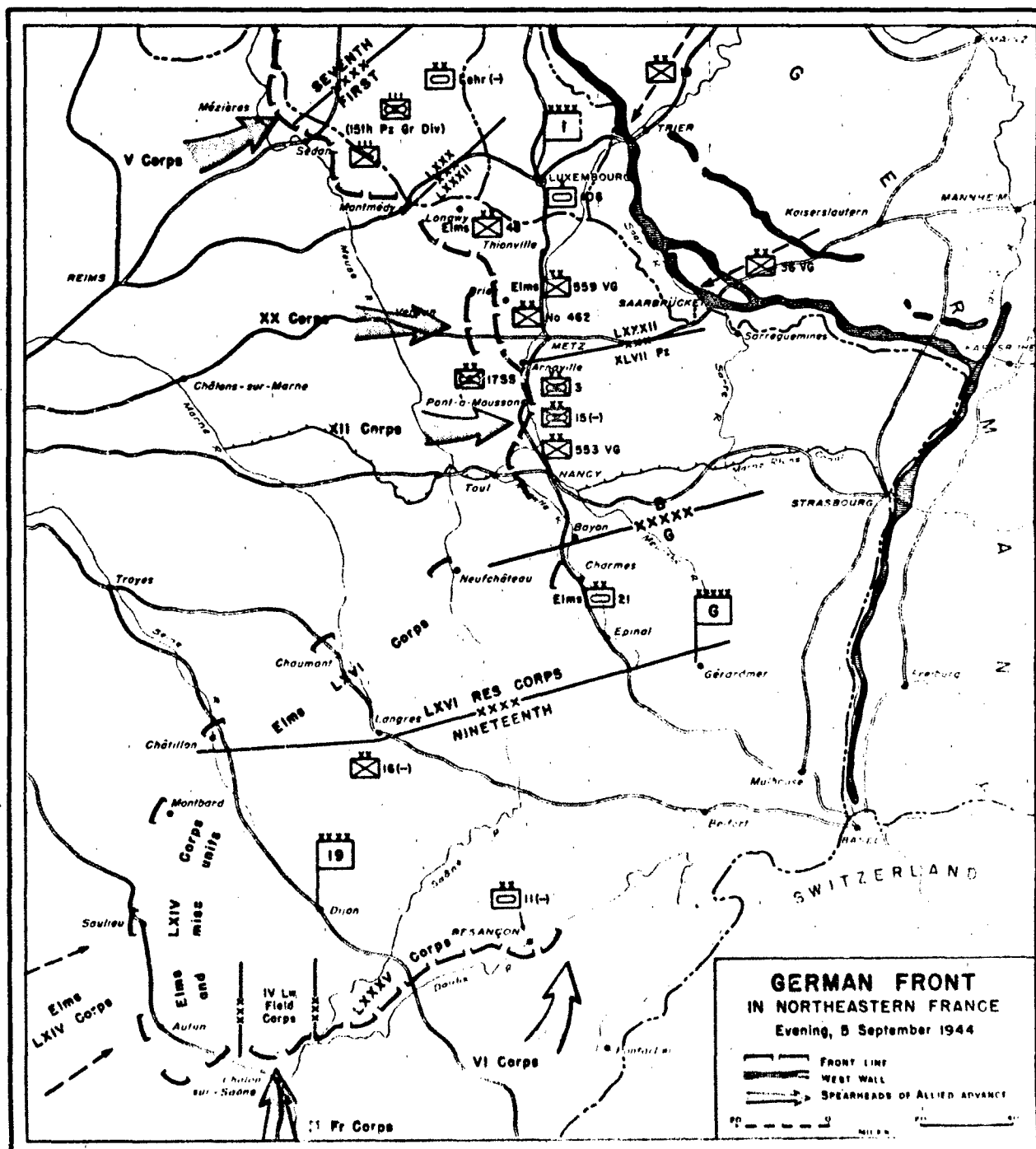


miles from south of Longwy on the Luxembourg border to a point approximately 20 miles south of Nancy before curving back west (offering a fairly exposed southern flank).

The 3d Army was composed of the XII Corps in the south and the XX Corps in the north, each made up of one armor and two infantry divisions. The XV Corps had been assigned to the 3d Army, but as yet had no divisions (they were with the 1st Army temporarily).

Maps on the following two pages illustrate the described dispositions.

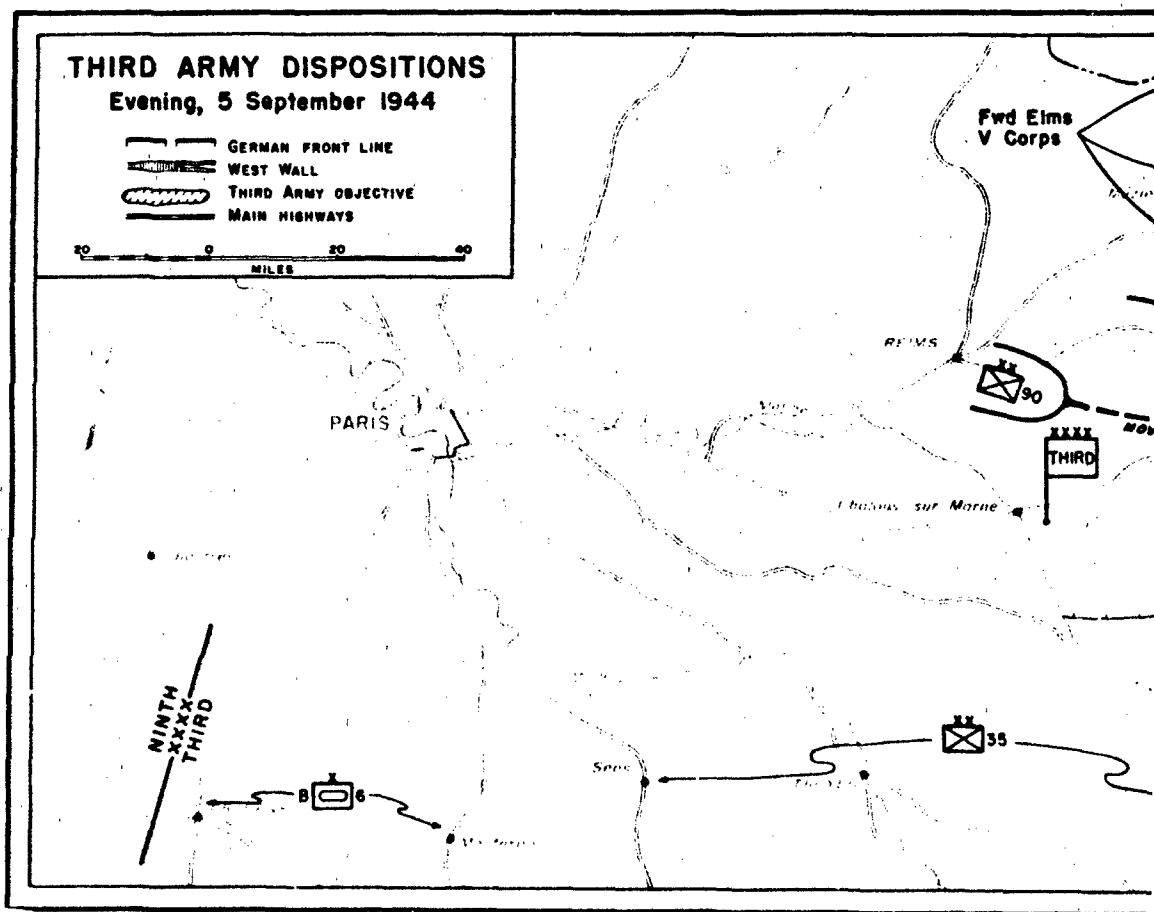
The fuel shortage suffered by the Americans as they ground to a halt after streaking across most of France gave the Germans time to regroup and plan for a counterattack heading northwest from south of Nancy into the relatively exposed southern flank of Patton's Army. This never materialized, because the fuel shortage ended in time to permit a U.S. attack, which began on the 4th of September.[11]



1-10000

REPRODUCED AT GOVERNMENT EXPENSE

MAP NO.



182



Printed by Defense Mapping Agency Hydrographic/Topographic Center

MAP NO. VI




272

### B. Opening Moves

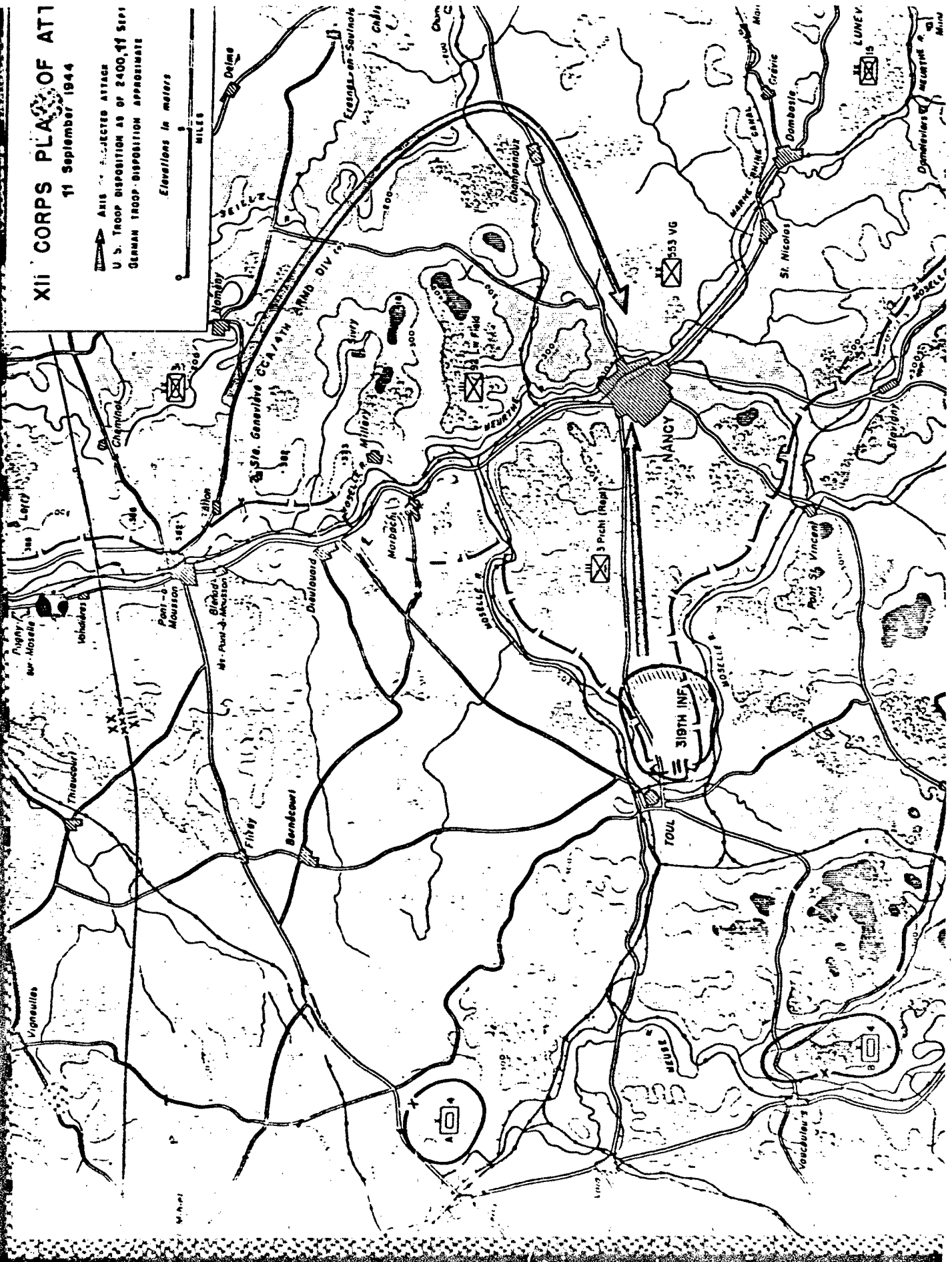
After successfully crossing the Meuse River, the 80th Inf Div, commanded by MG McBride, consolidated its position in the vicinity of the Commercy Bridgehead (see XII Corps Plan of Attack Map, 4 September 1944). What follows describes the actions of the 80th Inf Div and their opposition from 4 to 12 September, when the 80th Inf Div established a bridgehead across the Moselle River in the vicinity of Dieulouard. The period from 4 to 12 September was the overture to what became the famous deliberate river crossing of the Moselle at Dieulouard.

The 80th Inf Div was organized as three maneuver regiments, the 317th, 318th, and 319th Inf Regts. CCA, 4th Arm Div, was positioned to the east (to the rear) of the 80th Inf Div. CCA was to exploit the 80th's successful crossing and continue the attack as part of the XII Corps plan. [2] CCA was reinforced with the 1st Bn, 318th Inf. On 4 September the division was in assembly areas shown on XII Corps Plan of Attack Map, 4 September 1944. The 80th received the much needed FOL resupply and was ready to implement General Eddy's plan to capture Nancy. The 317th Inf was to establish a bridgehead in the northern portion of the division sector at Pont-a-Mousson. The 318th Inf (-) was the division reserve and was to force a "limited bridgehead" in the center of the division zone in the

# XII CORPS PLAN OF ATTACK 11 September 1944

 AXIS PROJECTED ATTACK  
 U.S. TROOP DISPOSITION AS OF 2400, 11 SEP  
 GERMAN TROOP DISPOSITION APPROXIMATE

 Elevations in meters  
 0 1 MILE



vicinity of Marbach. The 317th Inf, which appeared to have the longest frontage in the zone, was in the south; it was to secure a bridghead at Toul. The Moselle made a great loop about 10 mile due west of Nancy. This salient in the German line was lightly defended at the Toul crossing site, but still resistance would be encountered once across the river. CCA would follow the 317th Inf and be prepared to pass through the 317th in order to cut German escape routes from Nancy.

The 317th moved out toward the Moselle river on the afternoon of 4 September. One of its missions was to test the enemy strength at the Moselle line.[3] MG McBride had been given little hard intelligence as to enemy dispositions along the Moselle. Most intelligence sources believed that the Germans were too weak to make a stand on the east bank. The 317th's route of march moved along the Flirey-Pont-a-Mousson road. As it turned out the German forces had perfect observation of the entire division as its elements approached the Moselle.

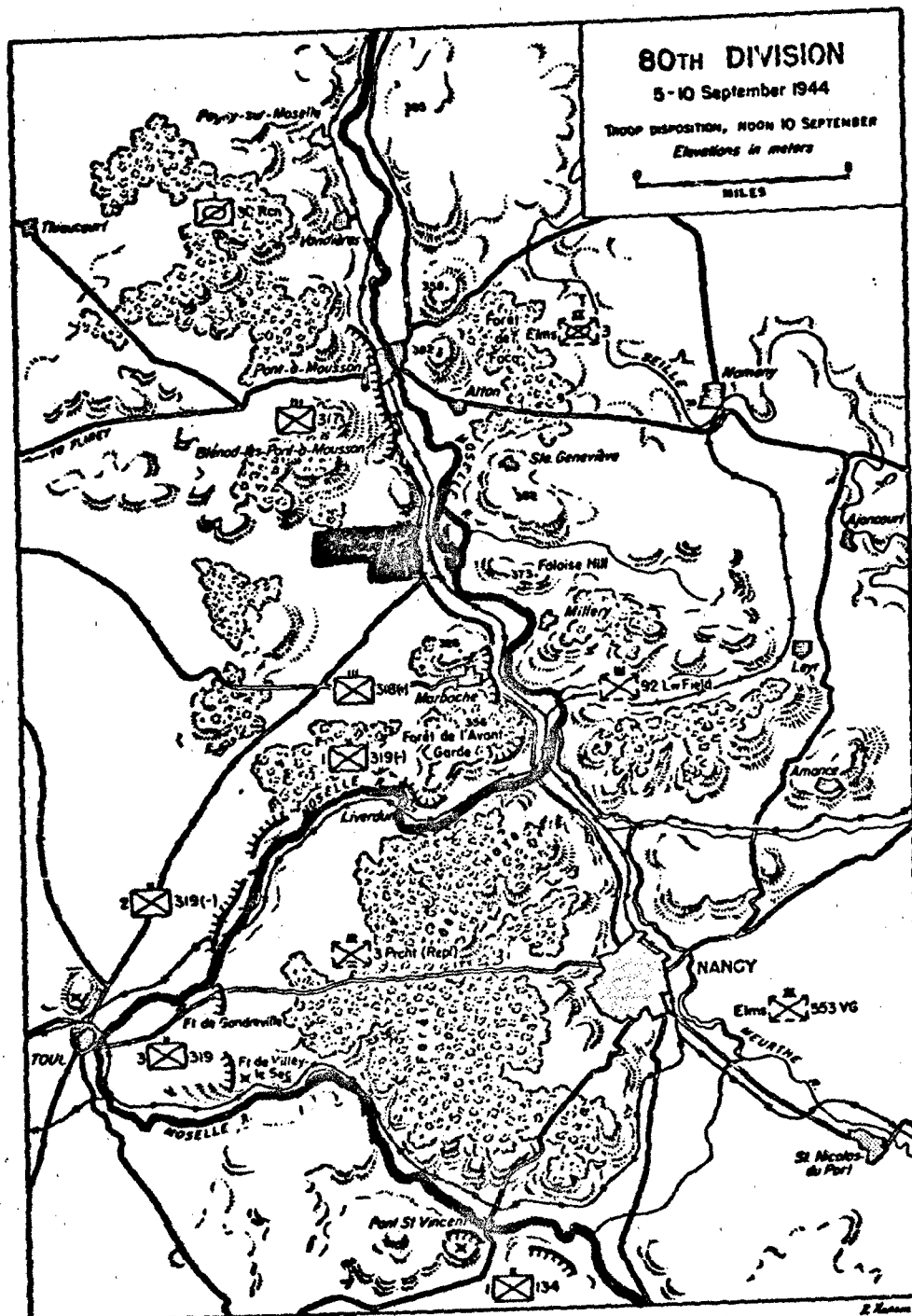
During the opening moves, the 80th Inf Div was opposed by three German units. The 317th fought against elements of the 3d Panzer Grenadier Div. This unit had just recently been moved from Italy. The organic engineers and armor battalion had yet to arrive. Its vehicles were of

Italian manufacture and in poor condition. The division did have all of its artillery on site. The 318th fought against the 92d Luftwaffe Regt, a newly formed regiment of antiaircraft gunners and replacements from the Nancy area. Later they were to be reinforced in a counterattack attempt by the 553d Volksgrenadier Div. The 319th was opposed by the 3d Parachute Regt. Its elements were extremely difficult to root out. They actually withdrew toward Nancy, but it is not clear that they were actually defeated by the 319th Inf.

As noted earlier, the U.S. forces had achieved tremendous success in their advance toward Nancy. The German forces were reeling from the speed with which the Americans were moving. The American commanders were optimistic about their success and let this optimism override tactical sense. The U.S. forces had been slowed in their assault for a period of 12 days. During this time the Germans were able to consolidate their positions and dig in on the east bank of the Moseele River. They deployed their artillery, mortars, and machineguns with such expertise that any crossing in the 80th Inf Div zone would be difficult and costly. The Germans knew a crossing attempt was imminent, because American cavalry activity had alerted them. The east bank of the river also contained the prominent high ground which had a commanding view of the 80th's proposed



**附註：**



crossing sites. Mousson Hill (382m), Ste-Genevieve (382m), and the Falaise Hill (373m) all had German observers on them and were to become decisive terrain in the battle for the Dieulouard bridgehead.

The 317th Inf closed into an assembly area overlooking the Moselle river in the early evening of 4 September. COL Cameron, the commander, sent recon patrols earlier in the day (1100 hours) to identify suitable crossing sites for his regiment. Prospective crossing sites were located south of Vandieres and near Dieulouard. However, it was ascertained that all points were in clear observation of the enemy. AT 1300 the battalions of the regiment were told to move as far forward as possible without being observed from Mousson Hill. The 2d Bn moved to the vicinity of Bois de Villers in the north and would attempt a crossing near Pagny. The 1st Bn moved to an assembly area in the Forêt de Peinvenelle near Pont-a-Mousson and attempt a crossing at Blenod. The 3d Bn moved into an assembly area in Bois-dit-la-Lampe and supported the leading battalion at Blenod. Though attempts were made to move into these positions undetected and unopposed, this was not successfully done. The enemy placed interdictory fires on the 1st Bn as it moved up. The 2d Bn had to fight its way into its assembly areas and lost communications with the regimental command post most of the day.

The general plan was for the 2d Bn to jump off across the canal and river, fording at Pagny, move due east up hill 385, turn south and move along the ridge line through the woods to the south, down to hill 365 west of Lesmenils. Hill 365 was the objective.

The 1st Bn was to jump off at the same time (0930, 5 September), moving east through Jezainvill, enter Blinod, approach the canal, cross and take assault boats across the river, pass south of Atton into the Forêt de Focq, and attack its objective (Mousson Hill) from the Forêt.

The 1st Bn started its move down into Jezainville and into Blinod. The weather was beautiful with good visibility and a temperature of 70 degrees. The unit reached Blinod and was waiting for its artillery preparation at 0900. At 0915 hours the Divarty commander showed up on site and stated there would be no preparation (no reason is given for the change in plan). Similarly, the air support did not arrive. One report indicates that the weather was bad at the departure airfield; another suggests the air support was committed elsewhere.

At 0930 the 1st Bn crossed the canal and was between the canal and river by 1000. It moved about 200 yards when enemy machinegun fire from the east bank (southwest of Atton) raked their position. The first burst hit eight men

in the lead company. At 1030 the formation began to move again to reach the west bank of the river. However, enemy artillery had been falling with extreme accuracy on the battalion's positions and had pinned down the entire battalion. The DIVARTY commander placed smoke concentrations on Mousson Hill; this move allowed the battalion to withdraw to the canal line at Blenod by 1500.[4]

The 2d Bn started their attack at 1000 hours (the original H-hour). They move out of their assembly area and were passing Pagny to the west when they came under enemy machinegun fire from the outskirts of Pagny. This position was neutralized in about 20 minutes. Soon afterward, enemy mortar and artillery began falling on the battalion. The fire was of such intensity that any move drew accurate fire. At 1230 the battalion commander sent out a reconnaissance party to look for another way across the river. They returned stating that no points were suitable without boats or a footbridge. Because the battalion was in such open terrain they were pinned down until dark. The battalion commander decided to attempt a crossing the night of the 5th at a point close to Vandieres. At 1930 the battalion began to move and advanced through Vandieres around 2400 hours on 5 September. The division engineers had constructed a footbridge across the canal. The infantry crossed the canal

at close intervals so that no one got lost. By 0200, 6 September, two companies of the battalion were across the canal. Another reconnaissance was necessary because this had not be the planned crossing site. By 0415 hours most of the battalion had reached the west bank of the Moselle.

"Then something happened which saved the lives of two hundred men. Our column was stretched in a horseshoe, bending to the south and back to the north. Suddenly out of the night, and sounding close enough to be on top of us, a loud voice sang out from the opposite bank in German: 'Halt,' followed by a garble of German like "Machenengewehr . . . "[5] All of the men hit the dirt and were saved from being cut down by an intense barrage of machinegun fire. After the machinegun fire came several rounds of mortar fire. Under continuous enemy fire the entire battalion crawled back to the edge the canal. By 0645 hours the battalion had reorganized and consolidated along the canal, but the German gunners continued to place accurate fire on the positions. The battalion remained in place throughout most of 6 September. At 1400 the battalion (-) began to move by truck to the south to the Forêt de Puvenalle. One company was left behind to hold Vandieres. The battalion closed about 0200 on the 7th.[6]

The 3rd Bn never really got into the fight. At 1600

hours they had not gotten started because they could not find a ford. When they did reach the crossing point, they had to take up defensive positions against enemy fire from the east bank of the river.

Meanwhile, the 1st Bn was to attempt a second crossing around 2200 hours on the 5th. They again attempted to cross at Blenod using assault boats. They were beaten back by withering fire from the east side of the river. The unit was cut to pieces, and was forced to pull back by 0100 on 6 September to a factory at Blenod. The whole battalion, shocked and demoralized, crowded into the factory building.

The 3d Bn was ordered north to force a crossing at Pont-a-Mousson. By 0200 on the 6th part of the battalion was across and had a toehold on the east bank. However, at daylight on the 6th those on the east bank suffered a severe counterattack. The men were caught southwest of Atton. Most of the men were killed or wounded, and 20 were captured by the enemy.[7]

The 317th Inf held its position along the Moselle from the 6th to the 12th, waiting for the plan for the deliberate crossing. The regiment had been mauled pretty badly. There are many reasons for the 317th's failure at crossing the Moselle from 4 to 6 September. "Insufficient time for daylight reconnaissance, a daytime attack, the decision to

dispense with an artillery preparation in order to gain tactical surprise, lack of coordination, and intelligence estimates that minimized the enemy strength had all contributed to the initial failure to bridge the Moselle. But the most important explanation of this reverse must be found in the fact that the enemy held ground superbly adapted to the defensive and that he was prepared to fight for it." [8]

The rest of the 80th faced toughening opposition and more difficult terrain as it moved forward. The 318th Inf (-) moved east along the north bank of the Moselle where it made a wide horseshoe to the west. The 318th's mission was to secure the high ground in the vicinity of Marbach. The 3d Bn kicked off its attack on the 5th with an attempt to take Hill 326 north of Marbach. The 92d Luftwaffe Regt was disposed on the heavily wooded hills and ridges surrounding Marbach. The 3d Bn had to fight for every inch of ground and did not achieve their objective until the middle of the afternoon on the 6th. The enemy left 75 dead and wounded on the hilltop. The 3d Bn also lost many men, including the battalion commander, LTC J. B. Snowden, II, who died because he refused to leave his men after he had been wounded.

The 2d Bn conducted a predawn attack to secure Hill 356 south of Marbach on 6 September. A battalion of the 92d Luftwaffe Regt was entrenched on the west edge of the Forêt

de l'Avant Garde. The 2d Bn with the help of tanks and tank destroyers dislodged the enemy from their initial positions, but the enemy fought stubbornly as they were forced back through the woods. The 2d Bn finally took Hill 356 sometime on 6 September in spite of effective enemy artillery from the east bank of the Moselle. On the night of 7-8 September the battalion sent patrols to enter and outpost Marbach. They were later ejected by a German counterattack. "The Germans launched a last series of counterattacks in the 80th Div zone north of the river on 8 and 9 September, using troops from the 553d VG Division to reinforce the 92d Luftwaffe Field Regiment. The recapture of Marbach was followed by sorties at Liverdun, where the 3d Bn was attempting to clear the north bank of the Moselle bend. This last flurry, apparently a rear guard action, soon was ended and by 10 September most of the enemy had withdrawn across the north-south channel of the Moselle or had fallen back toward Nancy." [9]

The 319th Inf was to attack at 0700 on the 4th to seize the high ground northeast of Toul. This accomplished, the 317th forced its way across the Moselle at the point where it touched the eastern fringes of Toul. "The terrain at the crossing site gave no advantage to the defender; therefore the Germans did not react in force." [10] On the 5th the 3d Bn began a push to extend the Toul bridgehead. They were



opposed by the 3d Parachute Replacement Regt. The enemy was deployed in old French fortresses that proved extremely difficult to crack.

The northernmost work, at Gonreville, fell to the 3rd Battalion on 5 September, the day on which the battalion began to wedge its way into the river salient. But Fort Villey-le-Sec, occupying the high ground on the southern flank, was stubbornly defended by a full battalion of the 3d Parachute and proved tough to crack. The fort was surrounded by a deep, dry moat faced with stone. The inner works had reinforced concrete walls and ceilings five feet thick, and steel cupolas housing automatic weapons and at least one 75mm gun. In the woods surrounding the fort the Germans had dug in machineguns, strung wire, and implaced a few artillery pieces. A preliminary attack on 6 September reached the fort but was broken up by cross fire from the German machinegun emplacements in the woods to the south.[11]

The next morning another coordinated attack was attempted with tank destroyer support. This attack made it to the walls of the fort, but was again defeated. Fort Villey-le-Sec was never actually defeated; however, the Germans withdrew toward Nancy on 10 September and the 3d Bn entered the fort.

Between the actions described above and the next crossing attempt, the 80th Inf div spent time in planning, reconnaissance, and consolidating its position on the west side of the Moselle River.

PRINCIPLES OF WAR: The 80th Inf Div failed to follow at least three of the principles of war during this first week of September, 1944. The units attacking across the Moselle had insufficient forces to accomplish the mission. They needed more artillery, air, engineer, and infantry support. The 317th Inf probably should have concentrated on one crossing instead of three; it failed to mass its forces. The division could not achieve surprise, because of the enemy's ability to observe all movement on the west bank of the Moselle. Consequently, a deliberate crossing should have been planned from the beginning. The enemy had two unexpected advantages: first, they were dug in in large numbers and U.S. intelligence did not know this; secondly, the enemy had excellent observation of the battlefield, a fact U.S. forces should have realized early on. Allowing the enemy to enjoy these advantages violated the principle of security.

CASUALTIES: There were no inclusive figures at the losses sustained by either side from 4-11 September. Research indicates that losses were high on both sides. The U.S. losses did not seem to slow operations. How German losses affected their actions is not known.

LEADERSHIP-SOLDIERS-COHESION: The accounts of leadership on the U.S. side indicate many good leaders at all levels. Circumstances were such that many leaders lost

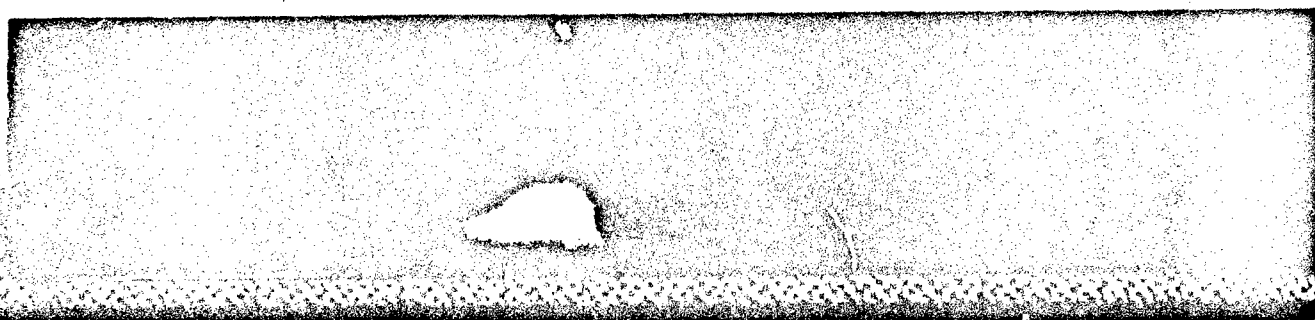
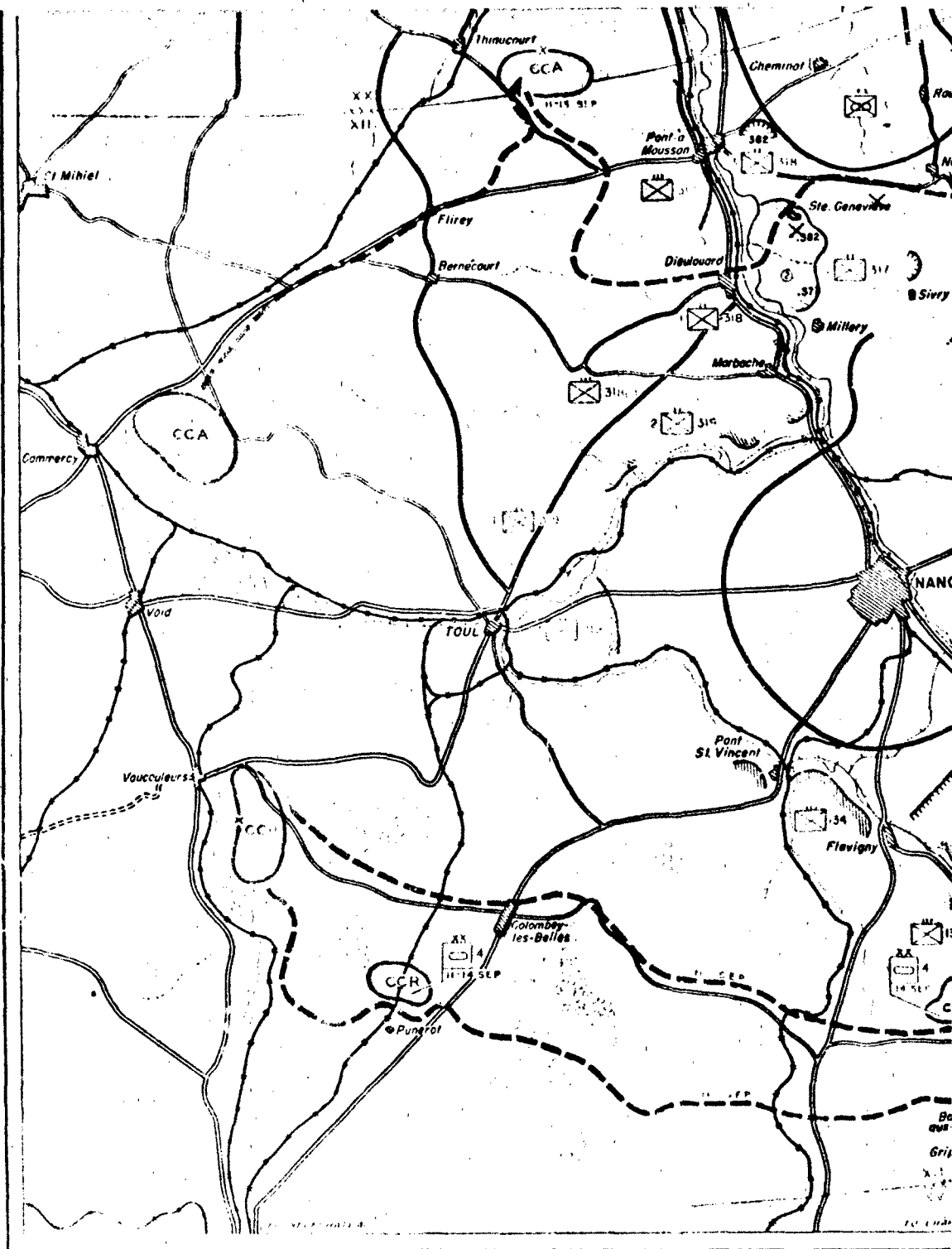
their lives, but the mission was continued without them. The soldiers were often described as badly shaken by combat actions. However, these "shaken" men continued to keep attacking until told to withdraw. The enemy must have had good soldiers and leaders, too, because they certainly put up a stiff defense against the attempted crossing. The U.S. forces maintained cohesion throughout the initial crossing attempts. There were instances when under fire or when caught in machinegun crossfire that unit leaders lost temporary control of their units.

### C. The Major Phases of the Battle

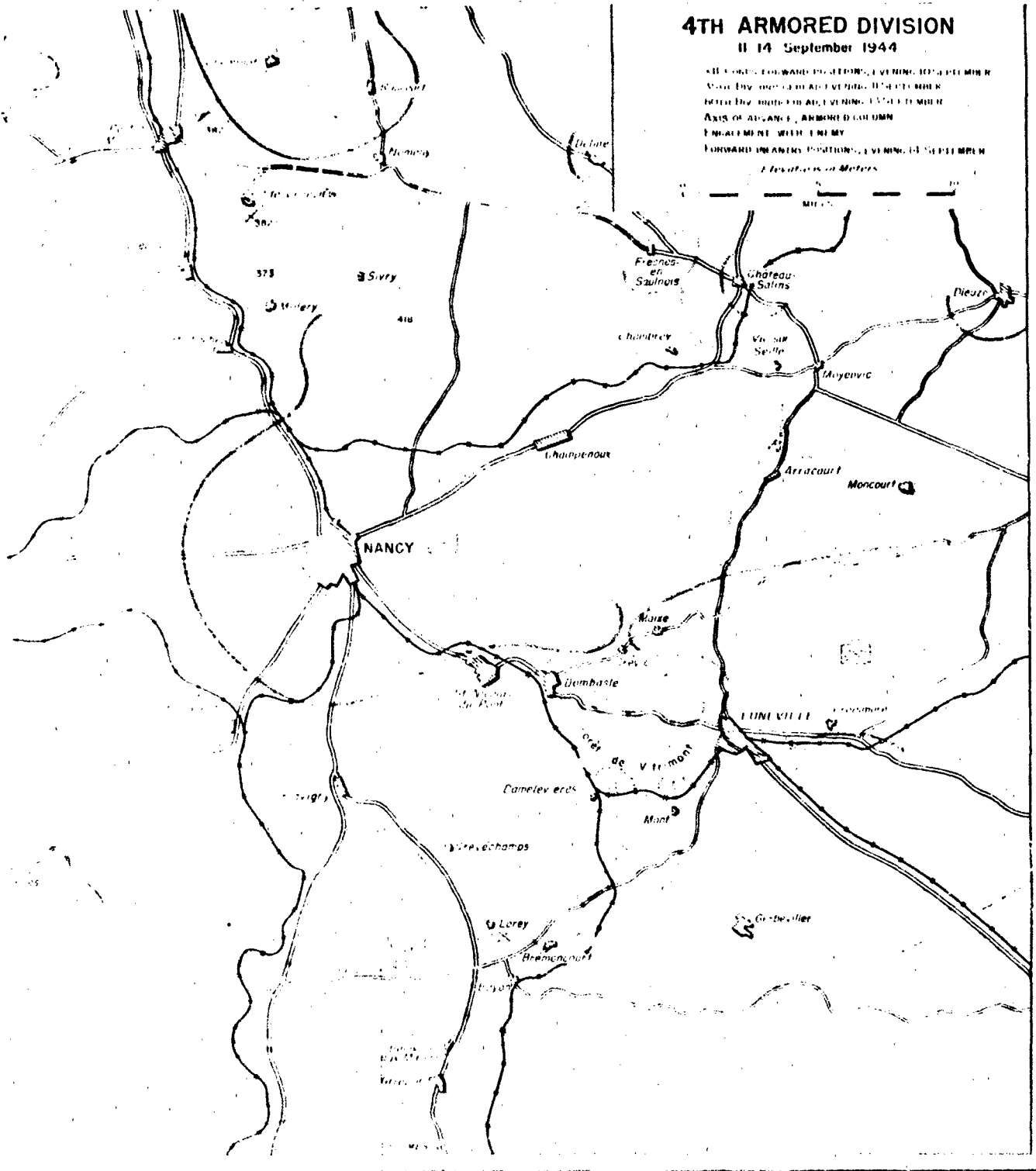
The "Opening Moves" <sup>(para 36)</sup> of the Moselle River Crossing cover the time from 4 to 12 September. The hasty river crossing on 5-6 September was fundamentally unsuccessful, except in the west bend of the river (where the 319th Inf had established a small bridgehead). After this initial failure to cross the Moselle, the XII Corps fell back to the west side of the river to regroup and replan for a deliberate river crossing.

The carefully coordinated deliberate crossing, included a scheme of maneuver for a double envelopment of the city of Nancy. The 35th Inf Div, with CCB, 4th Armd Div, would cross the river first and attack Nancy from the south. Once enemy attention was diverted to the south, the 80th Inf Div would be committed to cross the Moselle in the Dieulouard sector and encircle Nancy from the north. The CCA, 4th Armd Div, was held back as Corps reserve and would be available to exploit success, either in the north or south. [12] (See Map following page)

Only the chronology of events in the north, involving the 80th Inf Div and CCA, 4th Armd Div will be discussed here. The major events were: (1) preliminary artillery preparation and air bombardment; (2) 317th Inf and 318th Inf (-) crossing in the Dieulouard sector; (3) counterattack by elements of the 3d Panzer Grenadier Div; (4) CCA crossing

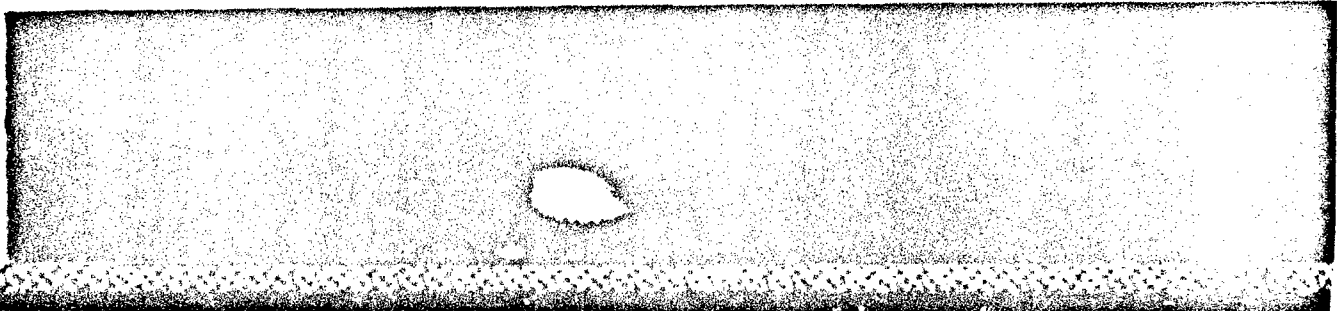


## 11 14 September 1944

[illegible]

For the  $\alpha_2$  (10.4 kDa) and  $\alpha_3$  (10.2 kDa) subunits, the  $\alpha_2$  and  $\alpha_3$  subunits were

MAP NO. X



and counter-counterattack.

The deliberate crossing began on the 12th of September. XII Corps learned many lessons from their first hasty crossing attempt on 5-6 September. The initial crossing was predicated upon the success the XII Corps has experienced up to its arrival at the Moselle. The initial hasty crossing did not allow time for field artillery assets to fully catchup, position, and support the crossing. Air support had been requested and expected, but was diverted elsewhere. In addition, intelligence sources severely underestimated the enemy's strength, defensive foothold on the east bank of the river, and his willingness to fight. (See Map Following page)

For the 12 September crossing, artillery and air firepower were coordinated and ready. In an effort to maintain some element of surprise as to the planned 80th Inf Div crossing time and location, American artillery fired concentrations on selected targets each day prior to the planned D-day, H-hour crossing. Although this artillery fire was not as successful as it could have been in attriting enemy forces, due to easterly winds rendering sound ranging equipment ineffective and rough terrain preventing visible detection of enemy gun positions, it did soften the enemy's position and helped disguise the American intent. [13]

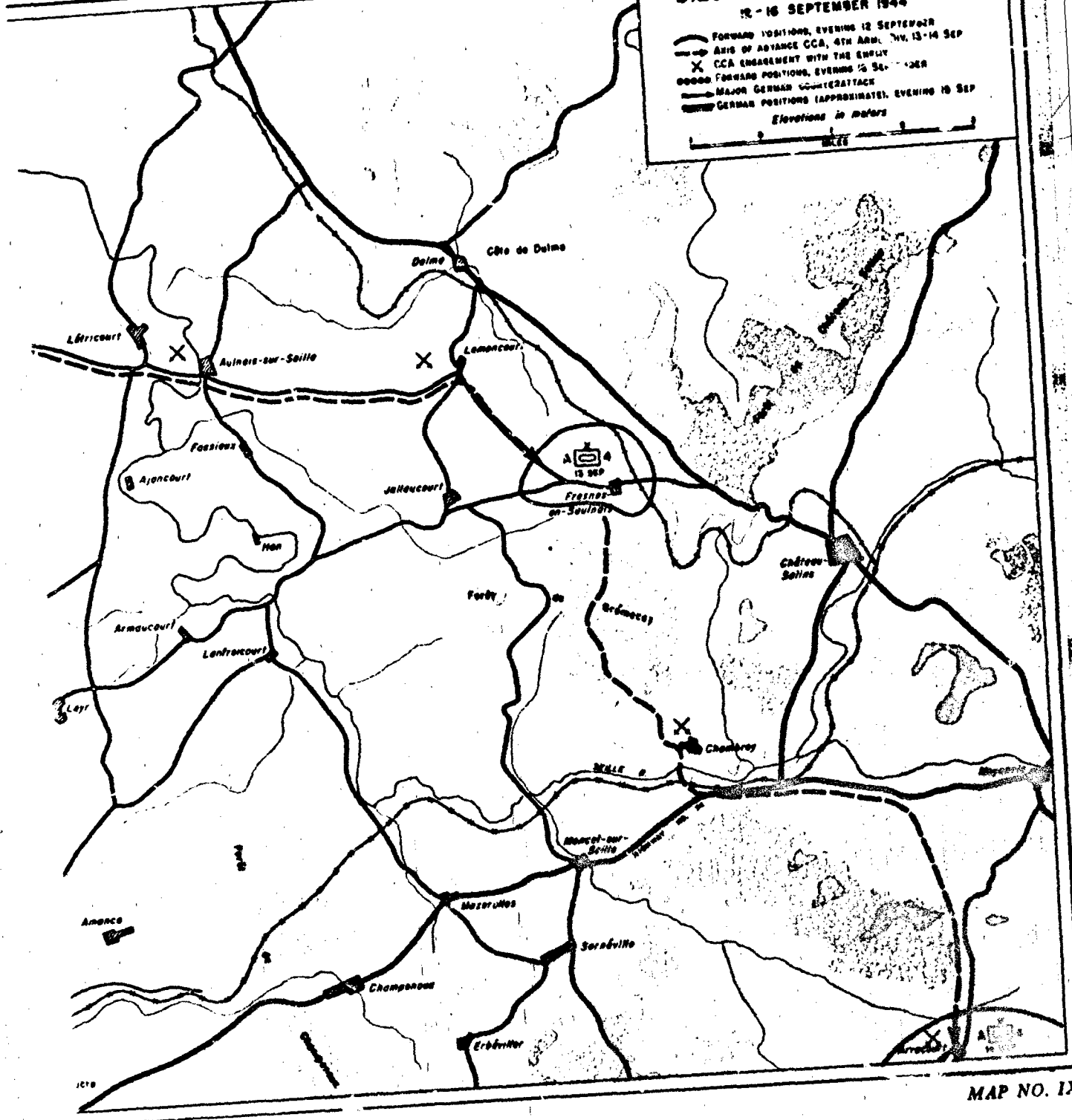
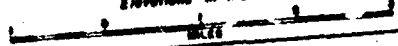




# DIEULOUARD BRIDGEHEAD 12-16 SEPTEMBER 1944

- FORWARD POSITIONS, EVENING 12 SEPTEMBER
- AXIS OF ADVANCE CCA, 4TH ARMD. DIV. 13-14 SEP
- X CCA ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ENEMY
- FORWARD POSITIONS, EVENING 15 SEP
- MAJOR GERMAN COUNTERATTACK
- GERMAN POSITIONS (APPROXIMATE), EVENING 16 SEP

Elevations in meters



MAP NO. IX

292

Airpower was used on the west bank of the Moselle. On 10 September, bomber aircraft cut the bridges south of Dieulouard on the Mauchere River. This bombing was intended to prevent the Germans from sending reinforcements north from Nancy. On 11 September airpower conducted a bombing feint at Pont-a-Mousson to divert enemy attention to the north of the designated crossing site. Artillery fire supported the shelling at Pont-a-Mousson. In addition, on 12 September at 0430 hours a 15-minute preparation by eight field artillery battalions was fired in the Dieulouard sector.[14] The combination of these deception and preparatory tactics must have been successful in confusing the enemy because the first American assault waves encountered only occasional German fire on 12 September.[15]

The first assault wave was composed of elements of the 317th Inf. They were responsible for seizing the river crossing site, securing a hold on the enemy bank, and taking control of a series of hills and ridges immediately east of Dieulouard.[16] The 317th Inf crossing was supported by nine battalions of field artillery, the 305th Cbt Engr Bn, and 1117th Cbt Engr Gp.[17] This combination of field artillery and engineer support contributed immensely to the successful river crossing. Field artillery laid down a moving barrage ahead of the 317th Inf, while engineers

repaired bridges and manned machineguns, putting a curtain of fire over the heads of the assault forces.

The enemy forces were not as numerous, prepared, or effective during this crossing as they had been during the 5-6 September crossing attempt. This lesser enemy resistance probably resulted from a combination of factors: the successful crossing of the 35th Inf Div in the south, the XX Corps crossing in the north, the field artillery preparation (continuous barrage fire), knocking out of the German communications net; airpower feints on the west bank at two locations other than Dieulouard, concealment of American troop movement prior to H-hour, the use of engineers as a combat reserve, and a drizzling rain that obscured enemy observation posts.

The 317th Inf crossing was so rapid that the 318th Inf (-) was able to begin crossing prior to noon on the same day. The 318th Inf (-) met little resistance during their crossing. All five battalions of the 317th and 318th were across the Moselle and occupied dug-in positions prior to nightfall.

Also on 12 September, heavy ponton companies began heavy bridge construction. By midnight tanks, field artillery, antitank guns, and towed tank destroyers were on the bridgehead.[18]

A brief reconstruction of the battlefield is necessary at this point to update the location of American and German forces. The 319th Inf has not been discussed because it crossed the Moselle west of Nancy on 7 September in the vicinity of Toul. During the 12 September crossing of the 317th and 318th (-), the 319th was fighting the enemy around Toul and preparing to continue east to Nancy on Corps order.

The 317th Inf was now across the river and occupying the high ground east of Dieulouard. This area was on the west slope of the Ste. Genevieve Ridge and northwest of Bezaumont. The semiorganized front was only some 3,000 yards.[19] The 318th Inf (-) took up positions on the reverse slope (east) of the Ste. Genevieve Ridge and west of Bezaumont. The heavy weapons and vehicles were being assembled in the bridgehead area.

The German counterattack began as darkness settled. The limited enemy activity during the daytime crossing was due to the fact that the 3d Panzer Grenadier Div was thinly manned in the Dieulouard sector at the time of the crossing. The detailed reasons for this thin line of troops was discussed above, but the main reason was the combination of American diversionary and deception tactics (success of the XX Corps crossing in the north and the 35th Inf Div crossing in the south).

About 0100 hours on the 13th the Germans organized enough firepower and troops in the Dieulouard sector to launch an initial counterattack. A battalion of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Regt, reinforced by at least ten assault guns, formed the initial counterattack from north of Loisy. The main counterattack started from the Forêt de Facq. An estimated two battalions and fifteen tanks were successful in rolling up the northern flank of the bridgehead. They recaptured the village of Ste. Genevieve, Bezaumont, and then joined up with the initial counterattack battalion, 29th Panzer Grenadier Regt, at Loisy to make a final assault on the bridge sites. The scrambled units of the 317th and 318th were overrun and driven back toward the bridges.[20]

The German counterattack was successful initially because the enemy tanks met little resistance from the lightly armed infantry. Within a few hundred yards of the bridges, the Americans were able to organize their tanks to meet the German tanks, proving again that the best way to fight a tank is with another tank. While the tanks dualed at close range, the infantry fought from houses along the river, and engineers defended the bridges with rifles and machineguns.[21] The Germans lacked reserves to reinforce the counterattack, and by daylight the enemy withdrew to the north. During their withdrawal, the 313th Field Artillery Battalion fired upon them. This ability to stop the German

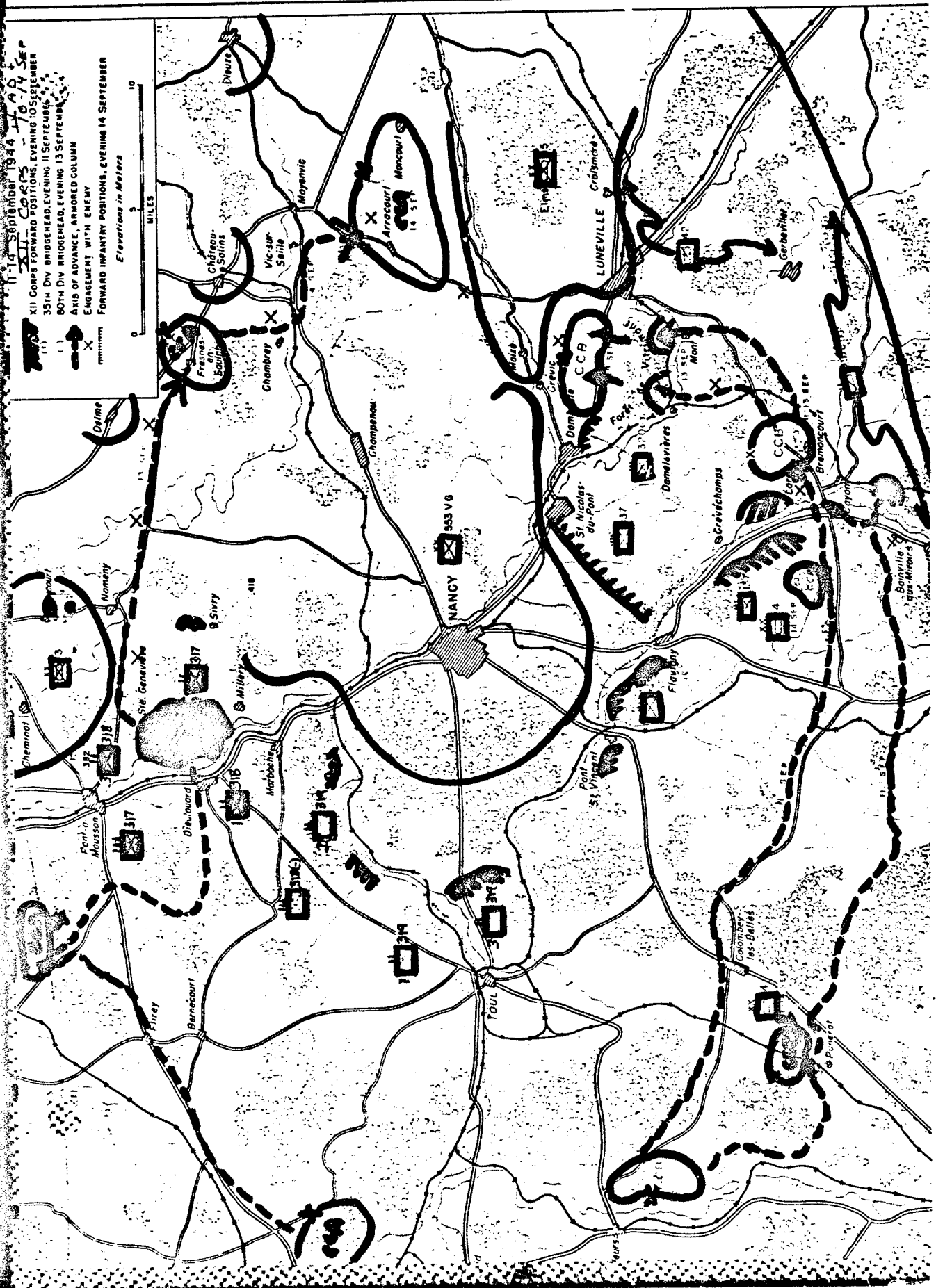
counterattack proved the worth of the combined arms concept. This integration of infantry, tanks, engineers, and field artillery won the battle. No one unit alone could have stopped the Germans.

The last phase of the Dieulouard crossing involved the CCA, 4th Armd Div. The CCA had been held in reserve during the initial crossing, awaiting gasoline and further orders. They were assembled behind the 80th Inf Div and were prepared to cross the bridgehead four hours after the heavy bridges were in and to strike for Château-Salins, some 23 miles east of Nancy. The decision to cross at Dieulouard was based upon the quick, successful crossing of the 80th Inf Div. The 1st Bn, 318th Inf, was attached to the CCA to give added weight to the armored drive.[22] *(See Map Following page*

The CCA crossed the Moselle at the same time that the German forces were within a couple hundred yards of the bridges on the east side of the river. Their arrival added momentum to the American turnback of the German counterattack. The CCA entered into the midst of the battle, pursued the retreating enemy, fought its way into Ste. Genevieve, and continued east. The 317th and 318th (-) reorganized and counterattacked in the wake of CCA. The 80th Inf Div, led by the 702d Tank Bn, met a weak German force, captured many enemy soldiers, lost only five tanks,

11-14 September 1944  
 XII CORPS - 10/14 SEP  
 35TH DIV BRIDGEHEAD, EVENING 10 SEPTEMBER  
 80TH DIV BRIDGEHEAD, EVENING 13 SEPTEMBER  
 AXIS OF ADVANCE, ARMORED COLUMN  
 ENGAGEMENT WITH ENEMY  
 FORWARD INFANTRY POSITIONS, EVENING 14 SEPTEMBER

Elevations in Meters  
 0 5 10  
 MILES



and regained control of Loisy, Bezaumont, and Ste. Genevieve.[23] Numerous counterattacks were conducted by elements of the 80th Inf Div, and by late afternoon of 13 September the original bridgehead perimeter had been restored.

CCA, under command of LTC Creighton W. Abrams, fought its way to Fresnes-en-Saulnois, only three miles from Château-Salins and continued its exploits under Corps orders. During CCA's initial rampage after crossing the Moselle more than 100 German tanks were destroyed, 1903 prisoners were taken with as many enemy killed, and the rear echelon of the 3d Panzer Grenadier Div was caught at Arracourt and wiped out.[24]



#### D. Description of Key Events of the Battle

The following will address two basic aspects of the key events of the Dieulouard Crossing: (1) What were the clearly recognizable turning points? When did they occur? What caused them? Did commanders take advantage of them? How did the enemy react? (2) Did commanders anticipate key events? Did key events favor one side or the other? How? Did key events affect the outcome of the battle? Why?

1. Phase 1, 4-6 September (the initial attempt to bridge the Moselle) . . . "The Assault at Pont-a-Mousson"

The fruits of success during this campaign belonged to the Germans. The most clearly recognizable turning point was their ability to hold key ground that was superbly adapted to the defense. "The halt in combat operations created by a gasoline shortage in the 80th Division allowed German commanders to conduct detailed reconnaissance and position their forces on key terrain that permitted unhindered observation of our advancing forces." [25] German forces occupied positions that extended from a point opposite Pagny-sur-Moselle south to Millery. German units, including supporting artillery and mortars were placed on the Mousson Hill, Ste. Genevieve Hill, and Falaise Hill and could watch every American move. Ultimately this proved to

be more than the 80th Inf Div could contend with. It was the superb use of this terrain that was the major reason for the American inability to accomplish the initial river crossing.

A key factor that influenced the outcome of Phase 1 was the lack of adequate planning conducted by the 80th Div. The principle reason for this was the emphasis placed on speed at the expense of providing adequate time to plan the operations. "Colonel Cameron, commander of the 317th Infantry Regiment, had been assured of air support for the operation and fully expected that the 80th Division Artillery would support his assault on 4 September. In actuality, the time necessary to affect coordination between the infantry, artillery, and air corps was sorely lacking." [26] On 5 September the XIX Tactical Air Command turned its entire striking power against Brittany ports, sending no planes to the Moselle front. Correspondingly, artillery preparation for the 317th was fired only by the 313th FA Bn on the right in direct support of only one battalion.

From the outset the operation lacked a total combined arms effort and the degree of coordination necessary to maximize all forms of combat multipliers. In the final analysis, this key shortcoming, coupled with inadequate reconnaissance measures and faulty intelligence estimates,

led to the American failure in this phase.

2. Phase 2, 8-13 September . . . "The XII Corps  
Crossed the Moselle north of Nancy"

The most clearly recognizable turning point of this phase was the ability of the 80th Div to seize and hold the bridgehead at Dieulouard, the pivotal point of the entire operation. This objective was not easily obtained but the operation was executed well enough to permit the counterattack force (CCA) to pass through the bridgehead rapidly. The elements of the 80th Div on the west bank of the Moselle were also successful at diverting the combat power of the Germans away from CCA so that it could maintain the momentum of the attack.

There were two reasons for the success enjoyed in this phase. The first reason was the U.S. ability to mount the kind of coordinated combined arms attack its units could not mount earlier. This was no doubt due to the previous lessons learned and the increased emphasis placed on improving planning and coordination. Early on, extensive patrolling was used to select possible crossing sites and to obtain up-to-date intelligence on enemy locations and dispositions. "To confuse the enemy, American artillery was used in a concentrated manner on daily fire missions aimed at selected targets. This fire was intended to forestall an

enemy alert when the guns opened fire prior to H-hour. As a preliminary to 80th Div's attack, the services of the IX Bomber Command (58 medium bombers) were obtained for a 10 September mission to destroy enemy positions and hinder their movement." [27] Each of these measures represented the detailed coordination and use of combined arms tactics that was absent from the initial phase of the operation.

The second reason for the American success was attributable to the efforts of the 2d Bn, 318th Inf, which mounted a successful defense against the Germans on 13 September. LTC Golden, the battalion commander, was able to quickly gather enough men and tanks at Pont-de-Mons to meet the final German assault. His forces were a combination of infantry and armor that was able to knock out the leading enemy tanks and assault guns. No Germans reached the bridges and the defense left the German counterattack in total disarray. German commanders had no fresh troops to commit to the battle and were forced to withdraw towards the north. The action of LTC Golden's forces was the turning point in the battle, and allowed CCA to begin crossing into the bridgehead and out into the retreating enemy forces.

### 3. Phase 3 . . . Penetration by Combat Command A

The most clearly recognizable turning point of this phase was the speed with which Combat Command A was able to

advance upon German forces on the immediate east bank of the Moselle and on eastward. "Over the two weeks of this entire operation the command advanced 45 miles into enemy territory within 37 hours. During this advance, the command reestablished a contested bridgehead, forced a breakthrough of a strong enemy defensive position, captured the command facility of a German division, and seized a map depot in sector. The advance was accomplished with negligible losses of personnel and equipment and in a manner that allowed the command to fully exploit its advantages. The penetration by the command and its seizure of positions behind German defenders had a decisive impact on the operations in the Nancy area." [28]

There were two key events which led to the successful execution of this phase of the operation. The first key was the superb command and control asserted over the command during the river crossing. The command was well organized, which allowed rapid movement across the river and an adequate projection of combat power on the east bank of the Moselle. The success was also enhanced by the tactical formations employed by unit commanders. "To gain the full benefit of armored thrusts, infantry units were in a follow on position where they could quickly exploit the advantages gained by the leading armor elements." [29] The second factor that led to the American success was the efficient

use of supporting trains elements to sustain the attack. Commanders made a practice of carrying along every available truck loaded with supplies and augmented their organic capability with attached truck assets. Because the trains accompanied the combat elements, the command was able to maintain the momentum of the attack.

From the German viewpoint the most critical factor of the period was the impact of the gasoline shortage in XII Corps' area. This shortage delayed the American advance for twelve days and allowed the Germans time to construct heavily fortified positions and to place indirect weapons fire on key terrain. The extremely stiff resistance put up by the Germans on the east bank was directly attributable to the time they had to prepare to meet the American advance.

#### 4. Phase 4 . . . CA from 15 to 18 September

"The most recognizable turning point of this phase was the flexibility we [the American forces] demonstrated in the use of our armor forces. The command was able to shift the composition of its task forces or combat teams to meet changing tactical situations." [30] This was observed with the movement of one force to Ste. Genevieve, another force to Luneville, and the sweep to the west of a third force. As these operations were executed, plans were being made to continue the advance to the northeast and reconnaissance

units were dispatched to support this plan. The flexible manner with which CCA executed these operations inflicted severe losses on the enemy in terms of manpower and equipment. German losses during these four days included 1070 killed or captured, 16 large caliber guns destroyed, 8 tanks destroyed, and 232 miscellaneous vehicles destroyed. The total casualties of CCA were substantially lower. During these same four days, CCA had 3 soldiers killed, 15 wounded, and 4 tanks destroyed.

"The decentralized form of command and control, a characteristic of the command, was also a major factor in developing the aspect of flexibility. Early on in the campaign it had been found that due to the swift movement of events, it was necessary to establish a division of responsibility and permit a latitude of decision to staff officers and commanders." [31] The division permitted officers to make decisions quickly and to take action when it was necessary. This authority fostered a sense of teamwork and established the flexibility that proved so valuable during this critical phase.

##### 5. Defensive Phase . . . CCA from 19-26 September

The most clearly recognizable pivotal point of this phase was CCA's ability to successfully engage in an active defense against a superior force of first class soldiers.

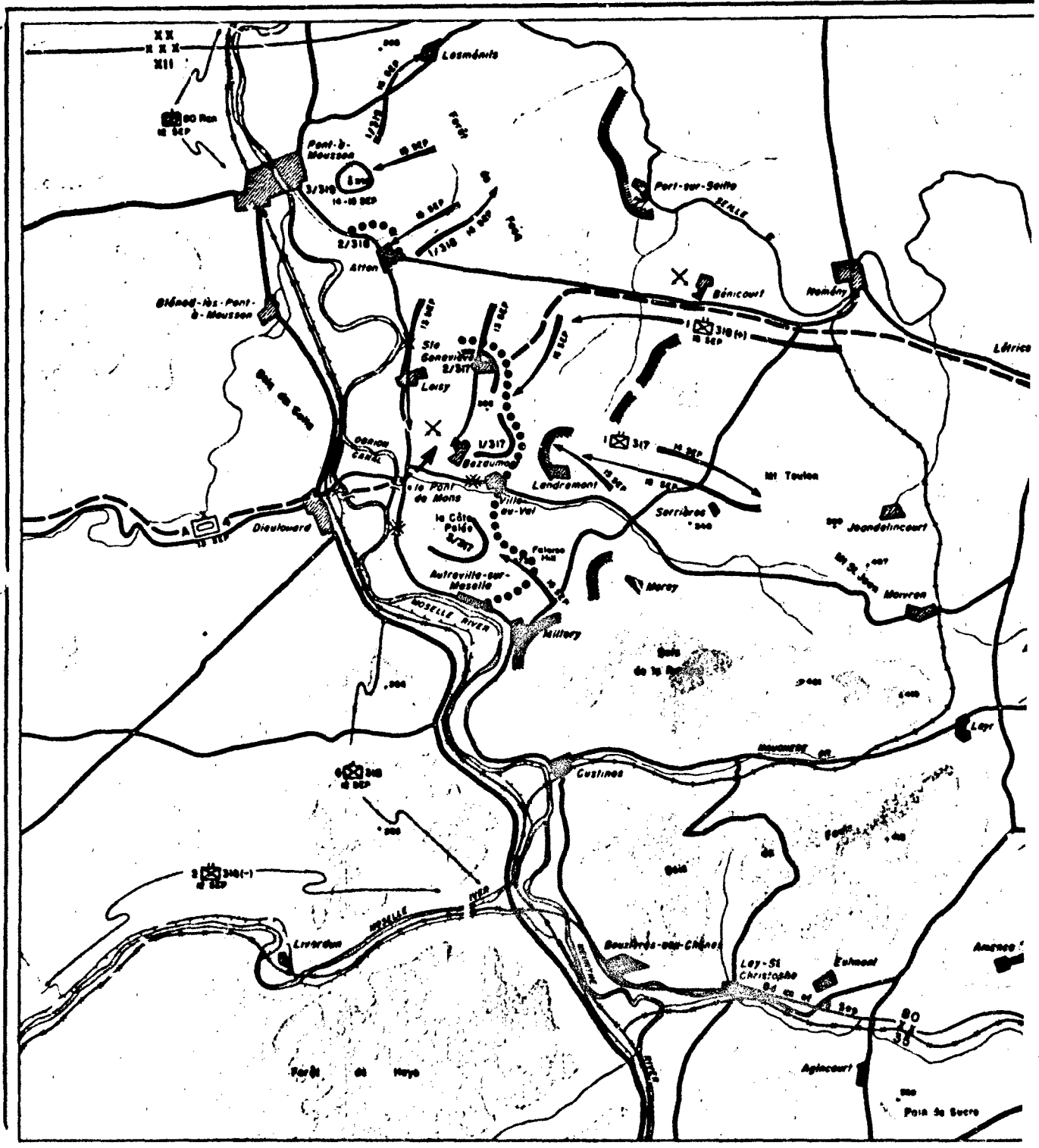
These efforts were complimented by the presence of reliable combat intelligence, close control, and the judicious use of mobile reserves covering an extremely wide front.

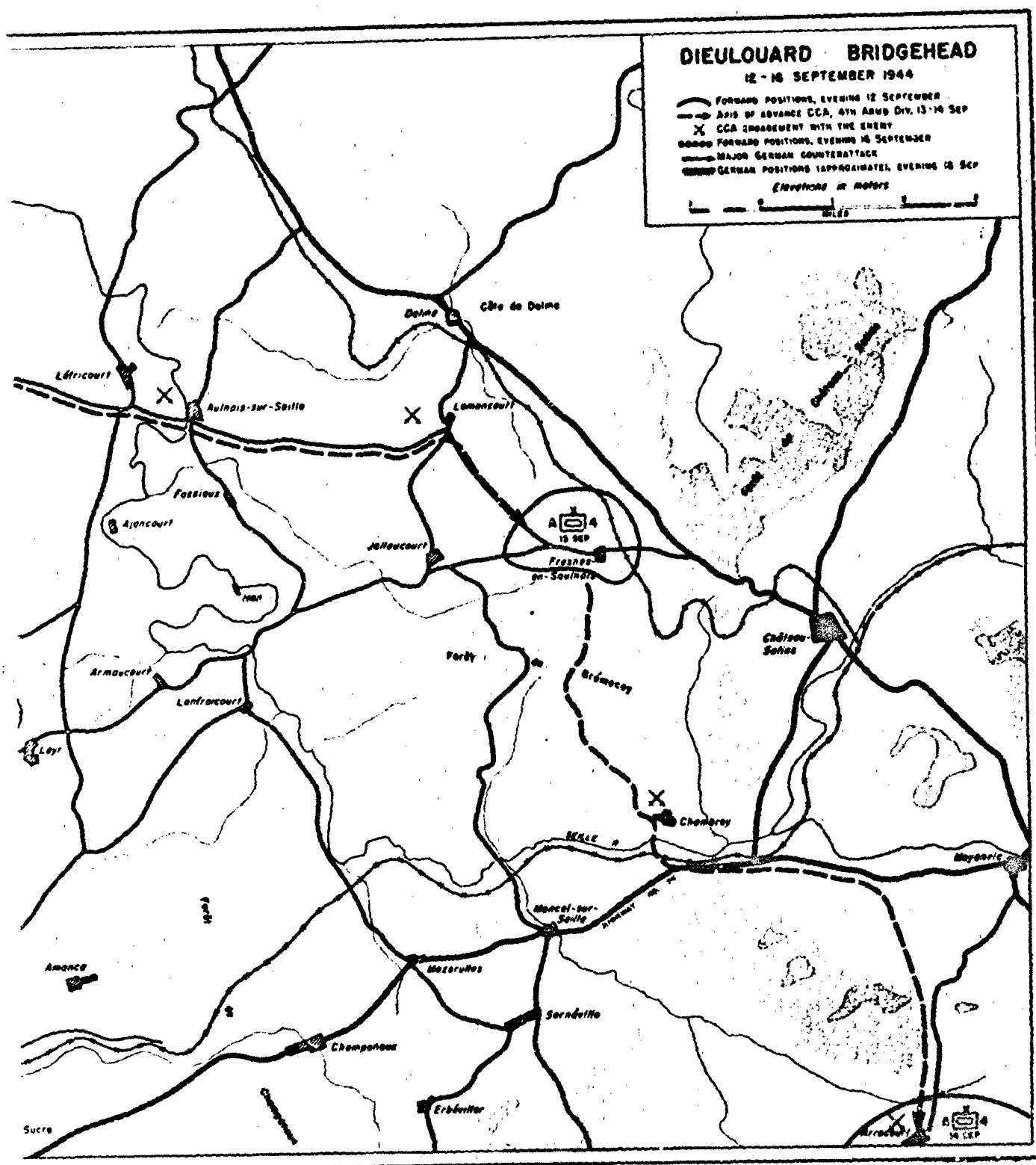
"The efficient control of our forces was typified by the operation on the morning of 20 September. On this day, it became necessary to double two combat teams back on their tracks through territory that was heavily defended. Both columns quickly executed the return movement without confusion and rapidly moved to assembly points around Arracourt. The success of this retrograde operation was testimony of the high state of training and morale of our forces." [32]

Of equal significance was the night attack on 22 September aimed at Moncourt and the extremely successful counterattack of the 37th Tank Battalion on the night of 25 September. The night attack on Moncourt was a classic and was the first demonstration of our ability to use tanks and infantry to engage the enemy during darkness. The counterattack of the 37th Tank Battalion, conducted under the most adverse conditions and under cover of darkness, was so successful that it was late on the following day before the Germans were able to mount any form of reaction.



MAP 2. DIEULOUARD BRIDGEHEAD, 12-16 SEPTEMBER 1944.





**MAP NO. IX**

272

### E. Outcome of the Action

The battle for the Dieulouard Bridgehead was unquestionably an American tactical victory. for the purposes of the present analysis, the outcome of the battle is probably better viewed in terms of "why" rather than "how" the opponents won or lost. The battle in and around Dieulouard, indeed the whole of the American Lorraine Campaign, was heavily influenced by a combination of both tangible and intangible factors. Chief among these were technology, surprise, morale, organization, logistical support, manpower, coincidence, luck, tactics, and leadership style.

The outcome of the battle was, of course, the breaking of the German defensive line and the subsequent drive to the so-called German "West Wall". In its roughly 45-mile thrust into enemy territory, the 4th Armd Div captured the headquarters of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Div and assisted the 80th Inf Div in reestablishing the bridgehead which served as part of the 3d (US) Army's base from which its 1944 Winter Offensive was launched.

The American success in establishing and sustaining control of the Dieulouard bridgehead can be attributed in great part to the flexibility permitted by the leadership and the individual initiative displayed by subordinates.

Granted, the speed with which the armored units maneuvered helped gain the element of surprise for the attacking Americans in several instances; nevertheless it was their unpredictable tactics and individual motivation which eventually allowed them to accomplish their mission. For many of the same reasons, applied in the negative, the Germans failed in their overall mission.

The American leadership style was reinforced by the fact that the chain of command from army down to division level was not only combat experienced, but, perhaps most importantly, its leaders were accustomed to working with each other from times even before the Normandy invasion. The German side, on the other hand, experienced frequent turbulence in their command structure and organization. This is exemplified by the changes in the CINC West from von Rundstedt, to Kluge, to Model, and back to von Rundstedt all within only two months.[33]

In addition to stability of command and the frequently accomplished element of surprise, the Americans enjoyed an ability to use initiative in accomplishing their missions. To their detriment, the Germans with their highly regimented system were held entirely rigid and allowed no flexibility whatever in strategic and virtually none in large scale tactical decisions. While this may be desirable from a strategic level and may even have been partly responsible

for Hitler's phenomenal early successes, it is totally disastrous on the tactical level. The fact remains that strict adherence to the letter of the orders of higher headquarters was an almost inviolate rule on the German side.

Unit cohesiveness and morale (or the lack of it) played a key role in deciding the battles around Dieulouard. The 4th Armd Div and the 80th Inf Div, both fresh from earlier successes, enjoyed a very high morale.[34] This was in sharp contrast to the low morale and lack of cohesion experienced by many of the German 1st Army and 5th Panzer Army units. Many of them had been rapidly constituted from remnants of defeated or at least seriously depleted units, thrown together to form larger commands, reorganized enroute and formed up--often for the first time--upon detraining in the Lorraine province during late August 1944.[35] Others, whose early September locations were nearby, were rushed into battle by truck and committed piecemeal in much the same fashion.

Logistical support, while conspicuously absent from both sides from time to time, was eventually more or less adequate for the American side. Conversely, the Germans continuously suffered from a lack of repair parts and replacement materiel. This was not an isolated case, but

rather was characteristic of the Axis situation as a whole. While the American units generally enjoyed an abundant supply of materiel once the Channel LOCs were functioning, their supply and transportation capability was hard pressed to keep pace iwth their rapid advances. Fuels were especially critical in Patton's 3d Army.

Technology and manpower played their roles in the battle as well. While much of the German equipment was technologically superior to that of the Americans, many German units were not really combat effective due to the lack of readiness of their equipment and the shortage of end items available. This was due partly to the frequent changes in Hitler's projects and the inability of the German industrial base to keep up with the constantly shifting priorities for production. The end result of this and the non-standardization of equipment designs was that line units such as those at Dieulouard were usually restricted in their ability to develop their theoretical combat power because of the low availability rates of authorized equipment or the lack of either replacements or spare parts for combat damaged materiel. This, coupled with the facts that much of the German Army was neither motorized nor mechanized (it was horse-drawn) and most German resupply was accomplished by the ever-vulnerable rail system, conspired to place them logistically at a serious disadvantage.

Although some adjustments were necessary, as can be seen from the frequent withdrawal of American forces from advanced, but exposed, positions, the battle was a reflection of the commander's original plans. One correction on the American side was occasioned by the fortuitous withdrawal of the 317th Inf from Mt. Toulon on 15 September. Its subsequent attack from the east (German rear) caught the enemy completely by surprise.[36] This action and the totally unexpected counterattack by the 318th Inf, again from the east as it returned from Arracourt on 16 September, so completely confused and demoralized the enemy that the final German counterattack in the Dieulouard area was crushed.[37] The American leadership style of flexibility and individual initiative combined with the intangible of luck (good and bad) to once again enable them to quickly adapt their plan to the situation.

The German leadership was, on the other hand, playing "catch up ball" from the outset. They were never really able to execute their plan to link the strong points (schwerepunkte) in the north and the south by introducing a strong reserve to stop the American eastward advance.[38] Their inability to react on their own initiative to the initial seizure of the bridgehead contributed significantly to the loss of the battle. Curiously, the initial seizure apparently caused little concern at either Army or Army

group headquarters. The startling success of CCA on the 13th did, however, cause immediate alarm.[39] From that moment on, often frantic attempts were made to execute the original plan. Time, misfortune, poor training, lack of resources, and inflexibility prevented the original plan from being implemented. General Knobelsdorff, commanding 1st (GE) Army, was never able to either concentrate sufficient power to execute his overall counterattack plan or to constitute a reserve capable of influencing the battle at the decisive point and time. It seems the primary reason for this was directly linked to the extreme inflexibility of the German military machine. For example, although the 1st (GE) Army ostensibly had its own reserve, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Div, that unit was in fact departing for the 5th Panzer Army's assembly area. It had been earmarked by Hitler himself as part of the planned 5th Panzer Army's counterattack on the 3d (US) Army's southern flank.[40] As such, it could not be committed without the approval of Army Group or more probably that of the Army High Command headquarters. General Knobelsdorff, then, was forced to make excuses to his superiors about the reason for delaying the release of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Div in order to belatedly form the semblance of a reserve. However, because of the poor readiness condition of the division (50% strength, 17 operational tanks on hand), this move was to no



avail.[41] Indeed, the 15th was for several reasons essentially ineffective. It was rated as capable of only a limited attack and was without its organic tank battalion, which was still enroute from Italy.[42] It was still in the process of being railed piecemeal from a defeat in Italy after ten months in combat and was physically strung out in columns from its starting point to 5th Panzer Army's assembly area.[43]

The doctrine for German armored units at the time was in part to "Keep what you have together!" It went on to say, "The less you have, the more you have to keep it together. Employ all available forces for one effective blow on a large scale and avoid piecemeal actions in dribs and drabs." [44] General Knobelsdorff was never able to accomplish this. Indeed, he violated--albeit for cogent reasons--both the doctrine and Guderian's admonishment to "strike with the fist, not with spread fingers." [45] The lack of a concentrated force and the inability to form a reserve combined with an unwillingness to allow alteration of higher headquarters' orders prevented any possibility of timely execution of the original German plan. In fact, it was not until the 3d Panzer Div under General Hecker was reinforced on the night of 14 September that any coordinated counterattack was possible.[46] Until this 15 September counterattack, the German efforts had been localized

counterattacks by such units as the 106th Panzer Bde, with only five operational tanks in the entire brigade.[47] Pending a coordinated effort, the German commanders were following Guderian's tactical teaching to "commit forces as they arrive and form a reserve by withdrawing and recommitting units not heavily engaged elsewhere." [48] This led to the previously noted violation of the doctrine of concentration at the decisive point, what current doctrine calls the principle of mass. In sum, then, while both sides had general plans of action, the Germans were not able to implement theirs effectively; and the Americans were able to adapt their plans to the ever-changing situation.

Finally, a brief comparison of training is in order. The American forces had engaged in lengthy preparation for the invasion of France and the push to Germany. German units on the other hand were frequently (by this point in the war) poorly trained at best. The 4th Armd Div had been training as a unit for some two years and had just gained over six weeks of combat experience together as it fought its way through France.[49] Individual training was perhaps even more sharply in contrast. The Americans were provided from 12 to 14 weeks of infantry and up to 21 weeks of armored crew training.[50] This compares to the generally spotty training from diverse sources that the German troops received.[51] These same German troops, made up largely of

quickly assembled injured veterans or young, inexperienced draftees, were often thrown into battle within 48 hours of arrival in the Lorraine.[52]

It is apparent, then, that the reasons for victory at the Dieulouard are complex and numerous. Generally, the Americans were better trained, supplied, motivated, and led than their opponents. The key terrain of the Ste. Genevieve Ridge, Mousson Hill, and the Falaise Hill were ultimately seized and controlled by the attacking Americans, and the poorly trained, supplied, led, and organized Germans could not muster the combat strength to dislodge them.

## IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION

As described in the Courses of Action above, the original XII (US) Corps plan was designed to capture Nancy with the 317th, 318th, and 319th Inf Regts by establishing bridgeheads at Pont-a-Mousson, Belleville-Marbache, and Toul respectively. CCA with a battalion of the 318th Inf was to pass through the bridgehead established by the 317th Inf, circle to the south, and attack Nancy from the east. The initial failure of this plan resulted in the Dieulouard crossing. The battle for the Dieulouard bridgehead was decisive, because it resulted in the Corps' being able to accomplish its original objective of securing a bridgehead, passing CCA through to attack Nancy from the east, forcing the German withdrawal from the Moselle, and permitting the Corps to continue its attack in zone.

The Dieulouard crossing, along with the XX Corps crossing of the Moselle, provided a base from which to launch a continued advance toward the Rhine and to accomplish the strategic objective of striking deep into the Saar industrial area. The supply situations, however, forced the 3d Army to go over to the defensive on 22 September, remaining in that posture with only limited objective attacks until 8 November (when XII Corps finally resumed the offensive). Had the supply situation been such that 3d Army could have immediately resumed the offensive,

the Dieulouard crossing could have provided 3d Army with a significant advantage. As it happened, though, the successful bridgehead and subsequent exploitation only provided for a better base from which to launch an advance to the northeast directed at securing bridgeheads over the Rhine River.

While it would be accurate to state that the success of the Moselle river crossings placed the Americans in a more advantageous position and thus placed the Germans in a less easily defended position, it did not materially alter the ultimate outcome of the war. The most significant outcome from a long-term standpoint was the defeat of the Germans in their first "stand and fight" attempt. The impact on morale was extensive, and its continued crumble can be followed from this point.

In sum, the Dieulouard crossing was significant on the division and corps level; however, it was of minor importance at the strategic level. The main value in its analysis lies in the tactical lessons learned in applying a particular doctrine to the unique equipment and logistical situation.

The failure of the 317th Inf's reconnaissance in force near Pont-à-Mousson (5-6 September) due to inadequate reconnaissance of the crossing sites and poor intelligence

concerning the enemy strength and disposition, produced several "lessons learned" which were immediately applied to subsequent river crossing operations. The ill fated hasty crossing at Pont-a-Mousson was characterized by insufficient forces and a lack of adequate artillery, air, and engineer support. The Dieulouard crossing, on the other hand, was conducted by two regiments deliberately attacking in column at a concentrated point.

Deception was used in an attempt to overcome the observation of the crossing sites by the enemy positions on the east bank of the Moselle. This was accomplished by employing artillery and air support throughout the zone without concentrating on crossing sites or increasing the volume of fire before the attack. Thus, the intentions of the U.S. forces were hidden until the attack was underway.

The underestimation of the enemy strength and their resolve to fight taught another lesson. The delay caused by the shortage of petroleum allowed additional enemy forces to move into positions east of the Moselle and for in-place units to fortify their positions. It also permitted the slow German command structure time to assess the situation and react to it with forces. U.S. forces anticipated being able to advance at the same rate they had when they pushed east from the Normandy beaches; as a result the order to

conduct the crossing was received at regimental level only a few hours before it was to be executed. This contributed to the failure to conduct an adequate reconnaissance before the first attempt at a crossing and its ultimate failure.

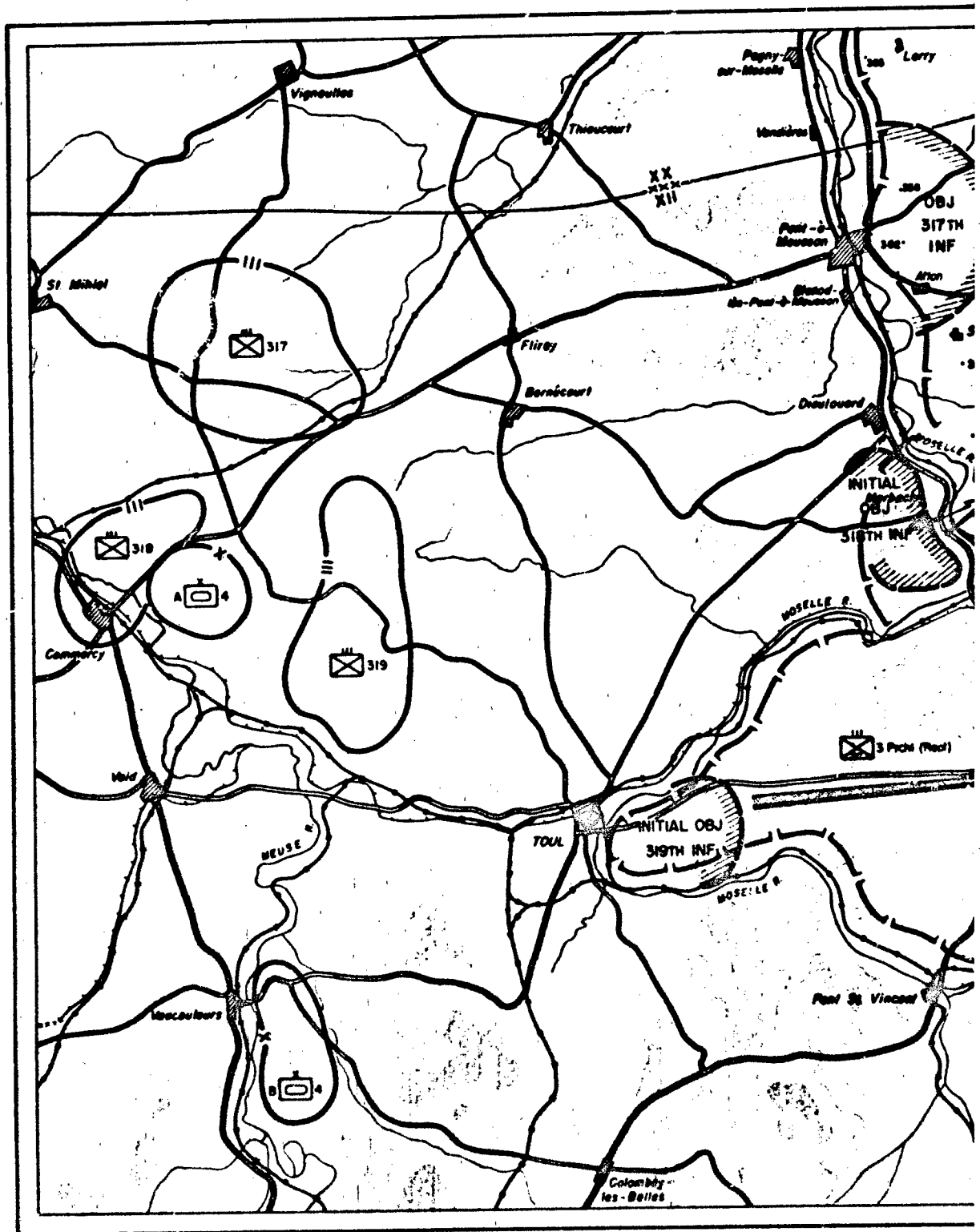
Another lesson learned concerned the significance of the flexibility with which American commanders down to the lowest level were allowed in making decisions and responding to situations as they arose. Reactions by American units such as those described above at Mt. Toulon on 15 September and at Arracourt on 16 September demonstrate the American units' ability to assess a situation and take appropriate, immediate action. The German inflexibility, on the other hand, limited their capability to take advantage of potential gains and to exploit opportunities for success.

In conclusion, the Dieulouard crossing demonstrated the flexibility and speed of armor in achieving a penetration and exploiting a successful penetration. The significant lesson that combined arms are needed to conduct a successful river crossing, where armored forces exploit the penetration and infantry troops protect against counterattacks, was never forgotten by the U.S. Army. Indeed, it was successfully applied time and again as the German defenses, which were invariably tied into river obstacles, were penetrated and crushed.

The synergistic effect of the combined arms attack, deliberately planned and executed, coupled with a good deception plan and flexible leadership, is what the Dieulouard River Crossing was all about. When combined with well-equipped and supported units, these lessons are a recipe for success worthy of study by contemporary military leaders, particularly those functioning at the tactical and operational levels.



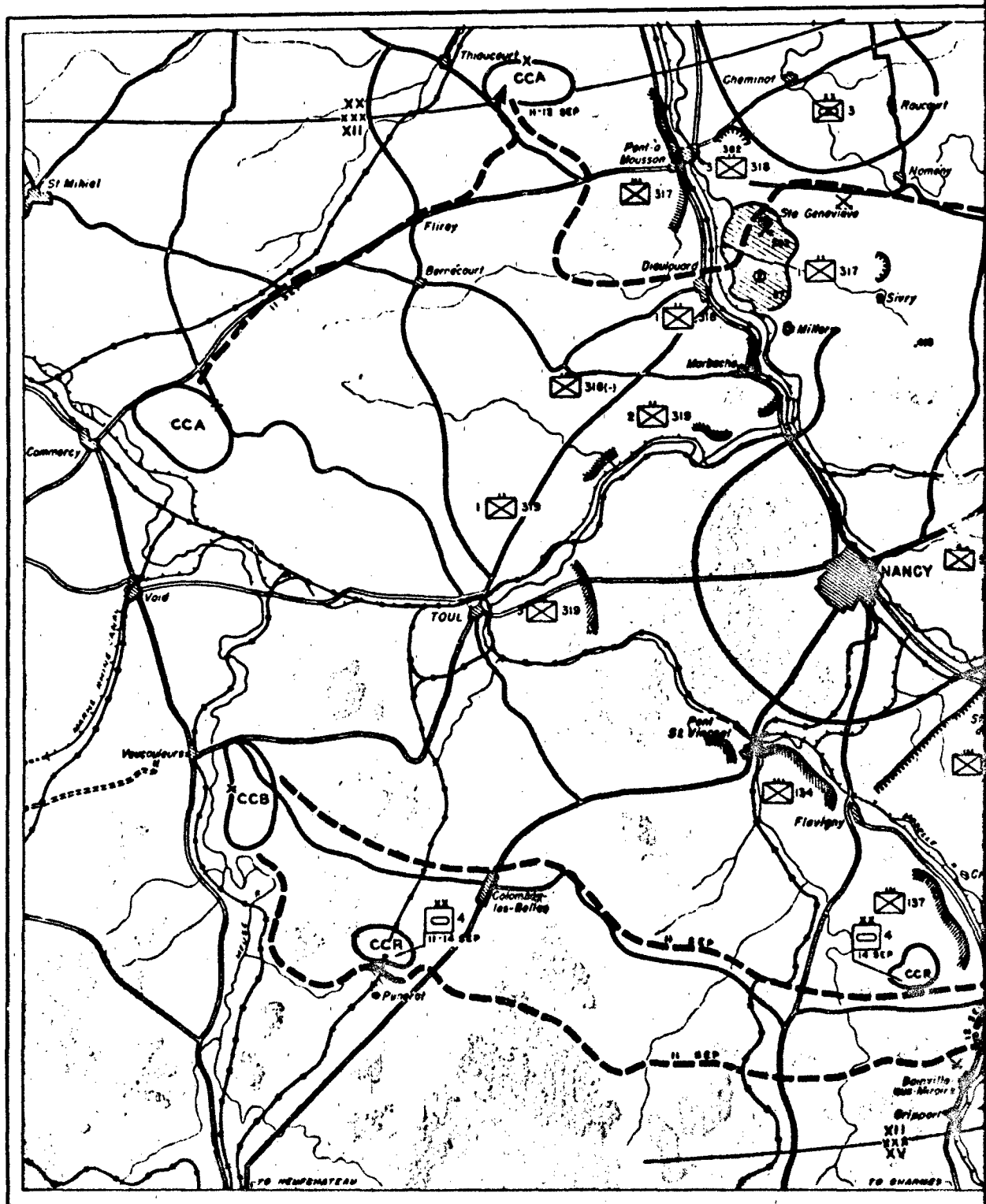
MAP 1. XII CORPS PLAN OF ATTACK, 4 SEPTEMBER 1944.



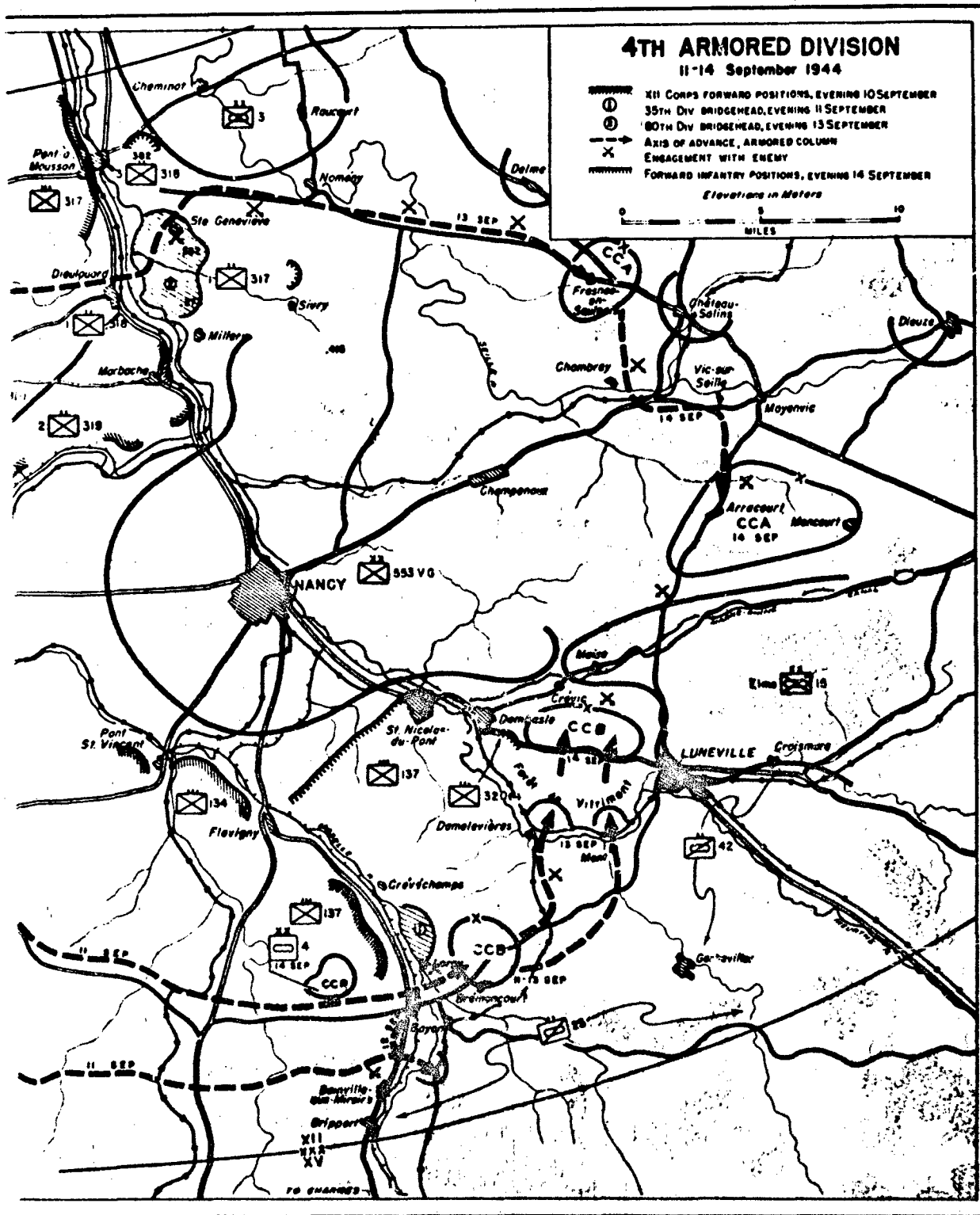
192



MAP 3. 4TH ARMORED DIVISION, 11-14 SEPTEMBER 1944.



1072



MAP NO. X

ENDNOTES

(III. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION)

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<sup>2</sup>Cole, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup>Cole, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup>The Moselle Operation; an interview with Major J. D. Hayes, 317th Regimental S2; interviewed by LT T. E. Burts, page 1.

<sup>5</sup>Crossing the Moselle River; and interview with CPT J. J. Mullen, CO of E Co., 2d Bn, 317 Inf Reg; interviewed by LT T. E. Burts., page 4.

<sup>6</sup>Interview with CPT Mullen, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Interview with MAJ J. D. Hayes, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>Cole, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup>Cole, p. 68.

<sup>10</sup>Cole, p. 66.

<sup>11</sup>Cole, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup>Cole, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup>Cole, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup>80th Infantry Division After Action Report, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup>Cole, p. 79.

<sup>16</sup>80th Infantry Division After Action Report, pp. 3-4.

17 Cole, p. 76.

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19 Cole.

20 Cole, p. 81.

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22 Cole, p. 76.

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28 The Establishment and Defense of the Nancy Bridgehead (Nancy Bridgehead), prepared by subordinate commanders and staff of CCA, 4th Armd Div, p. 3.

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<sup>35</sup> Oberst Wolf von Kahlden, German Army, Report to the Chief of Staff,  
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<sup>36</sup> Cole, p. 102.

<sup>37</sup> Cole, p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> Cole, p. 100.

<sup>39</sup> Cole, p. 96.

<sup>40</sup> Cole.

<sup>41</sup> Cole.

<sup>42</sup> Cole.

<sup>43</sup> Cole.

<sup>44</sup> Letter, HQ TRADOC, ATDO-C, 8 November 1983, Subject: CE Training  
Guidelines Published in 1944 (Guidelines), p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Guidelines.

<sup>46</sup> Cole, p. 100.

<sup>47</sup> Cole, p. 96.

<sup>48</sup> Guidelines, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Barnes, p. 42.

<sup>50</sup> Barnes.

<sup>51</sup> Barnes.

<sup>52</sup> Barnes.

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